



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
March 25, 2013

**MEDIA CONTACTS**  
Jerome Clark | 928.637.5603  
Carmenlita Chief | 928.255.3428  
Jared Touchin | 928.221.9253  
nlnb.communications@gmail.com

## **Health, Education, and Human Services Committee discusses legislation allowing Navajo Technical College to be named a university**

WINDOW ROCK – The Health, Education, and Human Services Committee on Wednesday discussed legislation aimed at approving amendments to Title 2 and Title 15 of the Navajo Nation Code, as well as the articles of incorporation for Navajo Technical College. The changes will allow for NTC, a wholly-owned nonprofit corporation of the Navajo Nation, to change its name to Navajo Technical University.

Legislation sponsor Council Delegate Danny Simpson (Becenti, Crownpoint, Huerfano, Lake Valley, Nageezi, Nahodishgish, Tse'ii'ahi, Whiterock) immediately drew the committee's attention to a proposed amendment in the articles of incorporation that would allow NTC to establish its own institutional review board.

The proposed IRB would be responsible for reviewing and approving all human and animal research conducted by NTC students, faculty, and individuals associated through institutionally sponsored projects.

"I think this will be this committee and the Naabik'iyáti Committee's main concern with the legislation," Delegate Simpson said.

NTC president Elmer Guy, Ph. D. stressed the need for NTC to have its own IRB as all other universities do.

"Part of educating students is that you have to teach them how to do research because they research to promote the field they're in," said Dr. Guy. "They research to add new discoveries, to add new knowledge."

Although HEHSC members expressed strong support for NTC being named a university, concerns were raised about the proposed NTC IRB being exempt from Navajo Nation Human Research Code.

Council Delegate Dwight Witherspoon (Black Mesa, Forest Lake, Hardrock, Pinon, Whippoorwill) and Navajo Epidemiology Center director Ramona Antone-Nez voiced opposition to specific language in the legislation which states that the proposed IRB and the board-approved research shall be exempt from requirements outlined in the Navajo Nation Human Research Code.

Delegate Simpson said he and Guy had met with Navajo Nation Department of Justice attorney Cherie Espinosa to address the language in the legislation, and asked HEHSC members to amend its wording so that the proposed NTC IRB would not be exempt from the HRC.

One of the main reasons NTC is pushing to establish its own IRB is to expedite the research approval process for students, Guy said.

Guy noted from his own experience that it took over a year for his doctoral research proposal to be approved by the Nation's HRRB under the current process.

He further stated that many Navajos, often doctoral candidates who want to do research on the reservation, are often discouraged from doing so due to the lengthy HRRB approval process.

"We lose that information that could've contributed to the Nation's needs," said Dr. Guy. "With our own IRB, [students] can do their studies here on Navajo."

Antone-Nez responded by saying that she does not oppose the legislation, but worries that it has the potential to create a "dual process" in which two entities would have the authority to approve research studies.

She went on to affirm that the HRRB should not be removed from the approval process because its purpose is to protect the well-being of the Navajo people from research, possible harm, and any adverse effects.

Council Delegate Joshua Lavar Butler (Tó Nanees Dizi) thanked Antone-Nez for bringing her concerns before the committee, and urged the HRRB to exercise greater efficiency and timeliness when approving research requests, rather than posing as an obstacle for researchers.

"I support this legislation, but the concerns over approval authority need to be resolved in order to avoid adding another layer of bureaucracy for research entities," Delegate Butler said.

HEHSC Chair Council Delegate Jonathan Hale (Oak Springs, St. Michaels) urged all sides to come together and iron out the issues.

"Division of Health is here, NTC is here, DOJ is in the middle, but nobody is talking," said Delegate Hale. "Not until it comes before us does it become evident that there's no communication taking place."

HEHSC members voted 4-1 to table the legislation until NTC, NDOH, and DOJ resolve their differences.

The legislation needs approval from the Law and Order Committee, the Naabik'íyátí Committee, and the Navajo Nation Council, in addition to the HEHSC.

A meeting between legislation sponsor Delegate Simpson, Navajo Nation DOJ, and NDOH is scheduled to take place today before the legislation is brought back before HEHSC.

###