



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Council approves supplemental funding for special education program

WINDOW ROCK – On Wednesday during the Fall Council Session, members voted unanimously to approve Legislation No. 0201-15, which would allocate approximately \$2.4 million to the St. Michaels Association for Special Education, Inc., if signed into law by President Russell Begaye.

For over 40 years, the SMASE, Inc. program has been a non-profit organization that provides educational, residential, medical, and therapeutic services to Navajo children and adults with mental and physical developmental disabilities.

Legislation sponsor Council Delegate Jonathan Hale (Oak Springs, St. Michaels) said that the supplemental funding would go towards restoration of their transportation services, educational programs, renovation of dilapidated buildings that do not meet code standards, reinstate staff back to full-time, continue the transitional program for adult disabled clients, and other services related to caring for special needs individuals.

“This entity has never been here [to ask for help], as long as I’ve been on Council. This opportunity came up and [SMASE, Inc.] approached me and asked for help,” said Delegate Hale. “These individuals are precious and we need to meet their needs in the best way possible.”

According to the legislation, the SMASE, Inc. receives funding from the Bureau of Indian Education, Arizona Public Schools, Arizona State DDD, Navajo Nation Division of Family Services, Navajo Nation Growing in Beauty, and public donations.

Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty (Beclabito, Cove, Gadi’i’áhi/To’Koi, Red Valley, Tooh Haltsooi, Toadlena/Two Grey Hills, Tsé ałnáož’t’í’í) said the legislation to aid the children and adults with disabilities should have been prioritized and put at the top of the list for supplemental funding.

“These are our children and our stories are imbedded with them. They are the special children of the Holy Ones and we have an obligation to take care of them,” said Delegate Crotty.

The program also provides day treatment services for adults and an education program for children, as well as 14 group homes on and off campus. Caregivers are responsible for management of their clients’ health care, education, development of independent and social skills, and community involvement.

Council Delegate Leonard Tsosie (Baca/Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Counselor, Littlewater, Ojo Encino, Pueblo Pintado, Torreon, Whitehorse Lake) suggested that Council members prioritize additional funding for persons with disabilities in next year's budget.

"We should have a clause in the budget to take care of our disabled people and elderly. We need to take care of their warmth and their homes. They should not have to wait to be given funding for their needs. They need sincere help," said Delegate Tsosie.

Council members voted 21-0 to pass Legislation No. 0201-15. President Begaye will have ten calendar days to consider the bill once it is sent to the Office of the President and Vice President.

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