



## 23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Health, Education, and Human Services Committee supports increased funding for Navajo Nation scholarships**

**WINDOW ROCK** – On Monday, the Health, Education, and Human Services Committee voted unanimously in support of Legislation No. 0480-17, which seeks to allocate funding in the amount of \$1.6 million to the Office of the Navajo Nation Scholarship and Financial Assistance from the Unreserved, Undesignated Fund Balance.

According to the ONNSFA department manager Rose Graham, their office received 16,965 financial aid applications in 2015 and 19,895 applications in 2016. In 2015, 46-percent of the total applicants were awarded, and in 2016 about 51-percent were awarded. She stated that it is ONNSFA's goal to fund more than half of the applicants.

Graham added it would take over \$60 million per year to fund all student applicants, however, ONNSFA is only able to award approximately \$9-11 million annually. At the rate of the current annual funding and the increase of Navajo students attending post-secondary institutions, the department anticipates that denials could increase to 600 additional students in the next year.

HEHSC member Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty (Beclabito, Cove, Gadi'i'áhi/To'Koi, Red Valley, Tooh Haltsooi, Toadlena/Two Grey Hills, Tsé alnáoz't'í) expressed support for the additional funding, and inquired about the number of students that are being recruited to come back to work on the Navajo Nation.

"If I recall from your policies that for a student to receive a scholarship, they must be committed to come back and look for work on the Navajo Nation. We have over 1,000 job vacancies right now, so how is your office complying with that policy requirement when an individual received a scholarship? I see these scholarships as an investment and these students are the greatest investment we have on the Navajo Nation," said Delegate Crotty.

Delegate Crotty said it was important to create a pathway for Navajo graduates to return to the Navajo Nation after completing their education, and suggested that her office collaborate with the Navajo Nation Department of Personnel Management to employ recent graduates.

Graham said she has issued requests to the Office of the President and Vice President recently, and to past administrations, to be a part of the hiring and selection process for job positions. Students are often rejected for employment because they are told they do not have enough job experience, according to Graham.

“I asked the administration to issue an executive order to redo the job qualifications. Students go through a lot to get a degree and that is the experience they have obtained. They take anywhere from two to eight years to complete their programs, but NNDPM asks for job experience outside of the degree. That’s just a policy change that can be made at an administrative level,” said Graham.

She added that ONNSFA should also be consulted when making salary adjustments because they found that an individual working in education who had obtained a Ph.D. is being paid much less than another employee who has no educational background, and is be deemed not qualified for their position per the qualification requirements for their position.

HEHSC member Council Delegate Nelson S. BeGaye (Lukachukai, Rock Point, Round Rock, Tsaille/Wheatfields, Tsé Ch’izhi) said that Navajo Nation leadership and program managers need to provide consistent funding and improve opportunities for students and graduates.

“We should add the \$1.6 million each year as part of ONNSFA’s annual budget. This needs to be a priority for the Office of the President and Vice President to look for ways to increase scholarships for our Navajo students. Supplemental funding is just a one-time allocation and we are cheating our students through denials because of the lack of funding,” said Delegate BeGaye.

HEHSC members voted 4-0 to approve Legislation No. 0480-17, and moves forward to the Budget and Finance Committee. The Navajo Nation Council serves as the final authority on the bill.

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