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**President Nez and Vice President Lizer successfully testify
in support of increased Impact Aid funds for Navajo students**



PHOTO: President Jonathan Nez testifies in support of S.B. 170 before the New Mexico Senate Education Committee at the New Mexico State Capitol in Santa Fe, N.M. on Feb. 8, 2019.

SANTA FE, N.M. – Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez and Vice President Myron Lizer provided testimony to the New Mexico Senate Education Committee at the New Mexico State Capitol on Friday, to help move forward Senate Bill 170, sponsored by State Sen. George Muñoz (D-Dist.4) and Sen. Clemente Sanchez (D-Dist. 30).

The bill seeks to phase out Impact Aid as federal revenue in the State Equalization Guarantee, also known as SEG. Federal Impact Aid is designed to assist local school districts that are not able to benefit from property tax revenue due to the presence of tax-exempt federal properties in their district.

Generally, a state that receives Impact Aid is not allowed to reduce state funding because the school district receives Impact Aid, but New Mexico's State Equalization Guarantee formula allows the state to reduce the amount it gives to schools that receive Impact Aid, subject to the approval from the U.S. Secretary of Education.

On the Navajo Nation, there are state school districts that receive Impact Aid due to the large amount of federal lands, which do not generate property tax revenue. These school districts have a high percentage of Native American students.

“Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, the Navajo Nation supports the initiative to implement needed change in the allocation of Impact Aid funding for Gallup McKinley County Schools where we have over 11,000 Native American students, Cibola School District which has nearly 4,000 Native American students, and Central Consolidated School District that has over 6,000 Native American students, most of which are Navajo children,” stated President Nez.

The position of the Navajo Nation is supported through Resolution NABI-01-19, which was approved by members of the 24th Navajo Nation Council on Jan. 30.

“These are our Navajo children. These districts struggle to fund school building projects due to their required match and their limited bonding capacity. Increased funding for our students through Impact Aid will not only help with facilities, but it will help to develop more cultural and language classes for Native American students. Studies show that our students achieve more at a higher level when we provide them with cultural and language courses,” stated President Nez.

Vice President Lizer also spoke in support of the two bills and requested the support of the Senate Education Committee.

“This matter should not be viewed on the basis on any one race or ethnicity, this is simply about doing what is right for the benefit of all children throughout this great State of New Mexico. If New Mexico tribes are strong, the entire state of New Mexico is strong. I respectfully ask you to do the right thing for our students by supporting SB 170,” Vice President Lizer said.

At the conclusion of the hearing, Sen. John Pinto (D-Dist. 3) requested a do pass motion, seconded by Sen. Gabriel Ramos (D-Dist. 28), and approved by a vote of 5-2. Senate Bill 170 now moves forward to the Senate Finance Committee.

President Nez and Vice President Lizer thank the sponsors of the bill, Sen. Muñoz and Sen. Sanchez, for their support in championing the bill for the benefit of all New Mexico students.

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