



25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Non-renewal of lease forces closure of AZ DES Window Rock office



PHOTO: The Arizona DES Window Rock Office has permanently closed its doors at the 54B Hwy 264 Jct location.

Window Rock, Ariz. – On May 31, the Arizona Department of Economic Security (AZ DES) closed their Window Rock Office due to the non-renewal of their current lease with HTE Realty.

Director of Arizona DES, Angie Rogers recently reported to the Naabik'íyáti' Committee that in March, she was notified that HTE Realty would not renew the department's lease. Since then, DES has been searching for a new location in Window Rock.

"Unfortunately, we have been unsuccessful. I am asking for your help in finding an emergency location for our staff to be able to disperse emergency benefits," Rogers said. "We can provide services virtually. However, we do not have a physical location where individuals can come to receive emergency SNAP benefits."

In a phone call, Navajo business owner and HTE Realty Vice President of Business Development, Patty Dimitriou provided clarification on the lease situation. HTE owns the entire business site where DES was located along with other tenants like the Navajo Times and Navajo Nation Gaming Regulatory.

According to Dimitriou, AZ DES was made aware of the non-renewal five years prior. She said it was difficult to work with the State of Arizona because they would not negotiate a lease that was reflective of Navajo Nation sovereignty or local taxation laws.

“The State was insistent on using Arizona rental contracts that excluded Navajo Nation sovereignty,” Dimitriou said. “If we had to pursue damages or non-payment, we didn’t have the proper channels through Navajo Nation laws or court. This was a significant concern.”

AZ DES is working with the Navajo Nation Office of the Speaker and the Office of the President and Vice President to find alternative locations and a long-term facility.

AZ DES operates approximately 45 locations in the state for benefits like food stamps, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Medicaid, the Division of Developmental Disabilities, Employment and Rehabilitative Services, Child Support, Early Intervention, Housing Assistance, Domestic Violence, and Homelessness services.

Speaker Crystalyne Curley (Tachee/Blue Gap, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tselani/Cottonwood, Low Mountain) said the Speaker’s Office and Health, Education, and Human Services Committee Chair Vince James has worked with AZ DES to temporarily situate the department at the Ganado Chapter.

For the DES schedule for the month of June and additional information, please call the Chapter at (928)755-5920.

“We will reconnect with the Executive Branch to see if there are vacancies available within any tribal buildings,” Speaker Curley said. “However, we need to relay the message to our people that the Window Rock DES office will be closed until a new location is found.”

Community members are also encouraged to utilize DES online and phone assistance at www.des.az.gov and 1(855)432-7587.

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