



25th Navajo Nation Council

25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Health, Education, and Human Services Committee receives update on Division of Aging and Long-Term Care Support



Health, Education, and Human Services Committee Chair Vince James (left) and Vice-Chair Germaine Simonson (right) make recommendations to ongoing issues and concerns within the Division of Aging and Long-Term Care Support system.

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – On Wednesday, Sept. 18, 2024, the Health, Education, and Human Services Committee (HEHSC) convened in a special meeting to receive updates from the Division of Aging and Long-Term Care Support (DALTCS). Reports were provided by DALTCS Program Manager Marlinda Littleman, Sr. Program and Project Specialist Lee Begay, and Executive Director of the Navajo Department of Health Sherylene Yazzie.

Delegate Helena Nez Begay called for better planning and communication between the DALTCS central office and Navajo agencies and asked for a more proactive approach to solving food insecurity.

“It is unacceptable for our elders to go without meals due to budgetary delays, we need to make sure the necessary resources are reaching them,” said Delegate Nez Begay.

Delegate Dr. Andy Nez expressed concerns about the department’s low expenditure rate noting that only 50 percent of the funds allocated for fiscal year 2024 have been spent.

Littleman emphasized that DALTCS is on track with its expenditures but noted some challenges related to budget approval and fund disbursement. She detailed efforts to fully utilize Title III funds for congregate and home-delivered meals, transportation, elder care, and health promotion services. She said delays have been experienced due to pending expenditure authorization signatures, but the division is working diligently to resolve these issues and begin allocating funds from New Mexico.

Council Delegate George Tolth inquired about the primary challenges to the shortage of food inventory at senior centers. Littleman reported that DALTCS is collaborating with various food vendors and grocery stores to provide fresh produce and reduce costs.

She noted the importance of revising meal plans and menus, with input from registered dietitians, to meet both budgetary and nutritional needs. Efforts are also being made to streamline procurement processes, allowing for multiple purchase orders to ensure a steady food supply.

Ongoing issues with utility payments at senior centers, particularly in the Eastern Agency, were addressed. Littleman noted that while payments had been submitted on time, paperwork had been misplaced, leading to delays and service interruptions. DALTCS is working with the Navajo Nation's Office of the Controller to streamline payments and avoid further disruptions. The division is also exploring the use of procurement cards (P-cards) to expedite utility and other essential payments.

To improve service delivery and financial management, DALTCS will host a two-day budget work session to review and adjust current budgets. The division also plans to increase communication and collaboration with senior center supervisors and agency staff to ensure more effective management of resources. Additionally, DALTCS is in the process of securing operational P-cards for external fund programs, allowing them to make purchases directly, thus reducing delays in resource allocation.

HEHSC Chair Vince James, expressed strong support for step increases for staff. The committee passed a motion to send a support letter to the Department of Personnel Management and other relevant departments to expedite the approval of the step increases. Additionally, HEHSC is considering legislative action to resolve ongoing personnel issues related to delayed evaluations and stagnant wages.

"Our employees are dedicated to their work, yet many have not received wage increases in decades. It's essential that we invest in our workforce so they can continue to serve our elders with the commitment they've shown, despite the lack of financial incentives," said HEHSC Vice Chair Germaine Simonson, highlighting the importance of improving morale and providing wage increases for DALTCS employees.

The Health, Education, and Human Service Committee plans to continue monitoring DALTCS's progress, with bi-monthly reports to ensure that the division remains on track with its objectives. The committee remains committed to ensuring that all Navajo elders receive the care and services they deserve and that DALTCS employees are fairly compensated for their hard work and dedication.

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