23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL
OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 21, 2016

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Health, Education, and Human Services Committee receives report from Casamero Lake Senior Citizens Advisory Council

CASAMERO LAKE, N.M. – On Monday, the Health, Education, and Human Services Committee received a report from the Casamero Lake Senior Citizens Advisory Council, regarding issues and concerns over the Navajo Area Agency on Aging program in the Eastern Navajo Agency, particularly as it relates to closure of the senior citizen center.

George Tolth, president of the Advisory Council, presented a written report to the HEHSC members and stated that some of the concerns regarding NAAA includes the need to improve direct services to Navajo elderly such as increasing funding for food supplies, arts and crafts, office supplies, and to address the lack of support from the central NAAA administration and executive branch.

"Several letters, petitions, and resolutions were sent to the Navajo Nation President and Vice President and the Navajo Nation Department of Health director to intervene to reopen our senior citizen center, but there has been no response from their offices," said Tolth.

Tolth added that the plan of operation for NAAA needs to be updated to be in accordance with the Older American Act of 1965, which offers a range of home and community-based services, such as meals-on-wheels and other nutritional programs, in-home services, transportation, legal services, elder abuse prevention, and caregivers support.

HEHSC member Council Delegate Nelson S. BeGaye (Lukachukai, Rock Point, Round Rock, Tsaile/Wheatfields, Tsé Ch' izhí) informed the Advisory Council that the 23rd Navajo Nation Council recently approved the FY2017 Navajo Nation Comprehensive Budget that included an allocation to the NAAA program to fully meet the needs of Navajo elderly.

"Council approved an amendment to allocate $1.4 million to the NAAA program because we saw that there were needs that have not been met. Our hope is that President Russell Begaye will not line item veto the funding so that direct services can be improved. We know that NAAA has been in need of increased funding," stated Delegate BeGaye.

On Sept. 8, Council approved an amendment to the FY2017 budget to allocate approximately $1.4 million from the Navajo Nation Office of the Controller's $12 million set aside, which is derived

from the Permanent Trust Fund interest income for the NAAA program. The proposed budget was delivered to the Office of the President and Vice President on Sept. 15.

HEHSC chair Council Delegate Jonathan Hale (Oak Springs, St. Michaels) said that the closure of senior citizen centers on the Navajo Nation is the result of the lack of reporting by NAAA under the NNDOH, and has affected food delivery to Navajo elders.

"I understand that there are also issues with food service to our elders because information that should be reported regarding the total number of elders being provided food services are not being turned in, and it effects the contracts we have with the food delivery companies," said Delegate Hale. "Casamero Lake is the first to expose these deficiencies and we take these concerns seriously."

Delegate Hale said the concerns from the Casamero Lake Senior Citizens Advisory Council and chapter constituents are important, and that the committee will look into their concerns and meet with NNDOH and Office of the President and Vice President to investigate the issues.

HEHSC members voted 3-0 to accept the report.

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