



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Health, Education, and Human Services Committee receives report regarding tribal correctional health care

WINDOW ROCK – On Monday, the Health, Education, and Human Services Committee received a report from the Tuba City Regional Health Care Corporation regarding tribal health care of Native American inmates in Navajo Nation correctional facilities.

According to the report, TCRHCC raised concerns regarding the lack of health care providers within correctional facilities that has resulted in high costs for transporting and treating inmates at offsite medical facilities.

TCRHCC chief executive officer Lynette Bonar said she had proposed solutions to address the health care concerns and said she hoped to garner the support of HEHSC and Navajo Nation Council members.

“We have the opportunity to make this better. We want the Bureau of Indian Affairs to enter into a [Memorandum of Agreement] with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to assign nurses and doctors within tribal jails,” said Bonar.

The proposed MOA would allow the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to direct the U.S. Public Health Service to assign Commissioned Corp Officers to tribal correctional facilities to provide health care services to inmates.

Bonar added that TCRHCC would like the Navajo Nation to initiate a request to the U.S. Congress to create an “Indian exemption” to Medicaid’s “inmate exception” clause to allow tribal health care facilities to be reimbursed for outpatient care to alleviate high health care costs that the Navajo Nation incurs for inmates.

HEHSC member Council Delegate Nelson BeGaye (Lukachukai, Rock Point, Round Rock, Tsaile/Wheatfields, Tsé Ch’ izhi) asked Bonar if TCRHCC received official support from other Arizona tribes.

“What kind of support do you have from other Indian tribes? Or are we doing this by ourselves as a tribe?” asked Delegate BeGaye.

Bonar informed the committee that the TCRHCC has received support from the San Carlos Apache Nation, Gila River Indian Community, Pascua Yaqui Tribe, and the Inter Tribal Council of Arizona. She added that they would continue to garner further support from other tribes and tribal organizations.

HEHSC chair Council Delegate Jonathan Hale (Oak Springs, St. Michaels) suggested to the committee that they also collaborate with the Navajo Nation Office of the President and Vice President, the Navajo Nation Division of Public Safety, and the Navajo Nation Department of Corrections.

“We need as much support as possible. Those that are incarcerated are people too and are our family members, regardless of what they did to incarcerate themselves, they still need adequate medical services,” said Delegate Hale.

HEHSC members voted 3-0 to accept the report.

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