



## 23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### MEDIA CONTACTS

Jared Touchin (928) 221-9253  
Jolene Holgate (928) 380-4174  
Crystalyne Curley (928) 286-7918  
nnlb.communications@gmail.com

### **Navajo Nation Council urges President Begaye to support grant for Navajo Nation Head Start**

**WINDOW ROCK** – The 23<sup>rd</sup> Navajo Nation Council unanimously approved Legislation No. 0107-16, in which Navajo Nation Head Start is requesting approximately \$3.6 million in supplemental funding from the Unreserved, Undesignated Fund Balance as a cash-match for a grant through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services entitled “Administration for Children and Families.”

According to the legislation, the federal government awards grantees 80-percent of the cost of the head start program and expects the grantee to fund the remaining 20-percent from cash or in-kind donations or services. The NNHS program was awarded a total of \$22 million for a five-year non-competitive funding cycle from 2015-2020.

Legislation sponsor Council Delegate Jonathan Hale (Oak Springs, St. Michaels) said that the federal government awarded approximately \$22 million to the Navajo Nation, who is responsible for the remaining in-kind contribution of \$5.6 million. The NNHS provided in-kind contribution in the amount of \$2 million, resulting in the cash-match need of \$3.6 million.

In-kind donations include volunteer services, valuing loaned equipment and space, valuing donated equipment, land or buildings, added Delegate Hale.

Council Delegate Seth Damon (Bááháálí, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Tsé Lichíí’, Rock Springs, Tsayatoh) expressed his disappointment with the lack of funding support from the Navajo Nation for the NNHS program.

“The NNHS program shouldn’t be sitting here before us like this asking for funding. They should’ve already received these dollars at the beginning of the fiscal year when we were approving our yearly budget,” said Delegate Damon.

He added that he is currently working with the Navajo Nation Office of the President and Vice President to include additional funding for the NNHS program in the FY2017 budget to ensure that they do not have to request future supplementary funding.

Delegate Damon then proposed an amendment to the legislation to provide additional funding in the amount of \$48,000 to go towards Head Start graduation caps, gowns, and promotional items for each of the 96 Head Start centers across the Navajo Nation. Each center would receive \$500.

In support of the amendment, Council Delegate Leonard Tsosie (Baca/Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Counselor, Littlewater, Ojo Encino, Pueblo Pintado, Torreon, Whitehorse Lake) stressed the importance of early education for Navajo children and said he recognizes it as a pathway to a successful future, as well as a remedy to social issues such as poverty and loss of culture.

“We need to take care of our children better. We have some bad social statistics and the way to correct it starts from Head Start. The language and cultural loss that we are incurring, that course is being reversed because of Head Start,” said Delegate Tsosie. “This is a fine moment in a family’s life, so this should automatically be a part of the budget.”

Delegate Tsosie stated that he would urge President Russell Begaye to approve the supplemental funding to aid NNHS to remain in compliance with the grant agreement.

Council Delegate Dwight Witherspoon (Black Mesa, Forest Lake, Hardrock, Pinon, Whippoorwill) said he opposed the amendment because he felt the responsibility of caps and gowns should rest with the parents through fundraising efforts.

“Being a person with an education background, I don’t mind parents wanting to celebrate and recognize their children and go all out for their Head Start student, but the parents should raise the money. I’ve seen many head start graduations where the young children are in beautiful, traditional clothing and they don’t need caps and gowns,” said Delegate Witherspoon.

Council members voted 19-1 to approve the amendment, and 20-0 to unanimously approve Legislation No. 0107-16. President Russell Begaye will have 10 calendar days to consider the legislation once the resolution is sent to the Office of the President and Vice President.

Delegate Damon also urged President Begaye to sign the legislation into law, while emphasizing the importance of the additional funding for graduation cap and gown items for Head Start students so they can feel proud to move onto the next grade-level with confidence.

“President Begaye, I ask you not to line-item veto this amendment. This will help out these kids and those less fortunate who can’t afford a cap and gown. I am asking you Mr. President, to have a heart and believe in these kids. I ask you again, please do not line-item veto this amendment,” said Delegate Damon.

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