

\$1.5 million approved by Navajo Nation Council to support St. Michaels Association for Special Education

Written by gallupsun

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WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – The 25th Navajo Nation Council voted unanimously to approve legislation to appropriate over \$1.5 million from the Navajo Nation's Unreserved, Undesignated Fund Balance to support continued operations of the St. Michaels Association for Special Education, which provides services for children and adults with developmental disabilities April 18, during the third day of the Spring Council Session.

Council Delegate Brenda Jesus (Oak Springs, St. Michaels) sponsored Legislation No. 0062-23, to provide funding to help the St. Michaels Association for Special Education overcome setbacks caused by the COVID-19 pandemic that led to a decline in funding, personnel, and other critical resources.

Jesus was joined by the Association's interim Executive Director Leroy White, who thanked the council members and the Division of Social Services for their support and assisting with the introduction of the legislation. He also explained that the Association has a long history of serving Navajo communities and assisting individuals with disabilities to exercise their rights to make choices, grow, and contribute to their community and become self-sufficient.

Chair of the Health, Education, and Human Services Committee, Council Delegate Vince James (Jeddito, Cornfields, Ganado, Kin Dah Lichíí, Steamboat), praised the hard work and commitment of the St. Michaels Association for Special Education's employees and caregivers who support special needs individuals. Speaking in the Navajo language, Delegate James stated that the special needs individuals are children of the Holy People and that it takes people with strong hearts and patience to help them every day.

During the discussion, council members spoke in support of the legislation and requested information regarding the Association's plans and strategy to become more financially stable and sustainable. They also thanked the Association for serving communities in various Navajo agencies and communities, far beyond the community of St. Michaels.

"As a former classroom teacher, I fully support and understand the degree of commitment that embraces any and all services to our children and adults with special needs. St. Michaels Association for Special Education deserves to continue its operations, and I proudly voted green," legislation co-sponsor Council Delegate Dr. Andy Nez (Crystal, Fort Defiance, Red Lake, Sawmill), said.

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Legislation No. 0062-23 was also co-sponsored by Council Delegates Eugenia Charles Newton (Shiprock) and Seth Damon (Bááháálí, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Tsé Lichíí', Rock Springs, Tsayatoh). The Council approved the legislation with a vote of 20-0. Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren will have 10 calendar days to consider the resolution once it is certified by Speaker Crystalyne Curley and delivered to the Office of the President and Vice President.

