

Begaye proclaims third week of October as Navajo Nation Disability Awareness Week

Written by Staff Report
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WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – President Russell Begaye signed a proclamation Oct. 20 declaring the third week of October to be Navajo Nation Disability Awareness Week.

“Despite their contributions to our society, people with disabilities face discrimination and limited access,” President Begaye declared in the proclamation. “This Administration will work to strengthen protections against disability-based discriminations Our people should not fear discrimination in disclosing one’s disability.”

Supporters and advocates for disability awareness set out on a march this morning from the Navajo Shopping Center in Window Rock to the Navajo Nation Council Chambers.

Upon arrival at the Council Chambers, marchers were greeted by staff from the Office of the President and Vice President and members of the 23rd Navajo Nation Council.

The Navajo Nation has enacted laws to protect the disabled. The Vulnerable Adult Protection Act, passed two years ago, says that any Navajo with a disability should not be abused, neglected, abandoned or exploited.

The Vulnerable Adult Protection Act, also known as the Doris Act, is named after Doris Dennison who faced disability injustices after being injured in a car accident that left her wheelchair bound.

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Losing her ability to walk opened her eyes to the challenges that disabled people face on a daily basis. As an advocate for disability rights, Dennison has served as the Board President of Assist to Independence.

“The work isn’t done. Since I’ve been advocating for accessibility, the main issue I want to see is the reconsideration of the Navajo Nation Vocational Rehabilitation and Opportunities for the Handicapped Act,” Dennison said.

The law, which was passed in 1984, requires that both public and private entities provide reasonable accommodations for the special needs of persons with a disability.

“Some of the things this act addresses are the accessibility to buildings and employment,” she said. “We want this act to be reconsidered and for the whole Navajo Nation to comply with it.”

The number of disabled Navajos is significant said Hoskie Benally Jr., President of the Navajo Nation Advisory Council on Disabilities.

The Navajo Nation Advisory Council on Disabilities is established under Title 13 within the Navajo Nation Code. “We are within the government to advocate for those with disabilities,” Benally Jr., said.

The Navajo Nation Advisory Council on Disabilities is established to advocate for individuals with disabilities to ensure equal access to employment, education, housing, public safety, communications, recreation, medical treatment, and socialization opportunities.

“We are stronger as a Nation when we work together,” President Begaye said. “We must work to remove obstacles so every Navajo and person has the opportunity to fully utilize their talents and skills in the workplace and communities.”