

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – The Health, Education, and Human Services committee approved Legislation No. 0407-16, which accepted amendments to the plan of operation for the Navajo Nation Department of Child Support Enforcement. The HEHSC serves as the oversight authority for the program.

In accordance with the legislation, the program will now be referred to as the “Navajo Nation Department of Child Support Services.”

Amendments to the plan of operation include modifications of child support obligations, the hiring of tribal court advocates and legal secretaries, locating custodial and non-custodial parents, and the establishment of paternity and medical support.

Other amendments that are significant additions include enforcing support orders, foreign judgments, orders and administrative agreements, and improving child support enforcement through case management specialists.

HEHSC chair and legislation sponsor Jonathan Hale (Oak Springs, St. Michaels) raised concerns regarding accountability in how child support funding is utilized for the benefit of children.

“You see some children outfitted in poorly, ragged clothing while the mother is dressed very nice with new purses and items that child support money could be potentially going toward. These children are important and I want to know what steps the department is taking to ensure the children have their needs met,” Hale said.

He added that the child support system should also ensure that a non-custodial parent is still able to visit their children to foster a positive relationship with both parents, and offer counseling if need be for all persons involved.

Judy Platero, program supervisor for the NNDCSE, said in August the program held public

Health, Education, and Human Services Committee approves amendments for Navajo Nation Department

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hearings across the Navajo Nation to obtain feedback on proposed changes to the Navajo Nation Child Support Act and guidelines.

HEHSC member Council Delegate Nelson S. BeGaye (Lukachukai, Rock Point, Round Rock, Tsaile/Wheatfields, Tsé Ch' izhí) recommended a work session between the HEHSC and the NNDCSE to discuss the results of the public hearings and to provide recommendations to amend the act. The work session will be scheduled in January 2017.

HEHSC vice chair Council Delegate Norman M. Begay (Alamo, Ramah, Tóhajiilee) asked Platero if the program has implemented safeguards to prevent individuals from filing for child support benefits off the Navajo Nation if they already have active benefits with the Nation, and vice versa.

“For instance, you have people who will claim in Bernalillo County, [New Mexico] and then come to Tohajiilee to try to collect other benefits, how are you guys tracking that?” asked Begay.

Platero said that the current system they utilize provides tracking by social security numbers and will alert their office if child support benefits are currently being paid out to the custodial parent and child from an outside agency, and will also alert the outside agencies if an individual is already receiving child support from the Navajo Nation.

HEHSC members voted 3-0 to approve Legislation No. 0407-16, and the committee serves as the final authority on the bill.