



Hardship Assistance program approved, Council to finalize criteria and application before Controller opens program to the public

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WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — Nearly \$50 million was added to the Navajo Nation CARES (Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Stimulus) Act Hardship Assistance Expenditure Plan through Navajo Nation Council Resolution No. CS-74-20. The Navajo Nation Council is planning to consider and then approve an application process this week, thereafter giving the Office of the Controller all necessary approvals to implement the hardship assistance program.

“With the enactment of the CARES Fund Hardship Assistance Expenditure Plan, the Navajo people will receive additional assistance for the hardships brought on by the coronavirus pandemic,” said Speaker Seth Damon (Bááhaalj, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Red Rock, Rock Springs, Tséyatoh). “The Council is inviting the Navajo public to enter their comments on Legislation No. 0251-20, which encompasses the hardship assistance eligibility criteria and application process. This is one of the final steps before the Office of the Controller can begin fully establishing the program and delivering the assistance, and it’s the public’s opportunity to provide input on these important criteria.”

The hardship assistance program will provide up to \$1,500 per eligible enrolled Navajo tribal member who was over the age of 18 as of Mar. 1 and \$500 per eligible enrolled Navajo tribal member who was under the age of 18 as of the same date.

The program was established previously under Navajo Nation Council Resolution No. CJY-67-20 and then further funded through Resolution No. CS-74-20 enacted Friday.

The Office of the Controller reported to the Office of the Speaker that the online portal to accept hardship assistance applications is currently under development. The final website will be based on the criteria and application process approved by the Council.

Legislation No. 0251-20, sponsored by Council Delegate Carl Roessel Slater (Round Rock, Rock Point, Tséché’izí, Lukachugai, Tsaille-Wheatfields), addresses the hardship assistance program’s eligibility criteria and application process. It will need the recommendation of the Health, Education, and Human Services Committee before it is finalized by the Budget and Finance Committee through its vote of approval. The legislation is currently undergoing a five-day public comment hold to ensure the public may give their input.

Broadly, the purpose of the hardship assistance program is to provide emergency financial assistance for purchasing personal protective equipment (PPE), paying past due utility bills, rent, mortgages, isolation expenses, livestock-related expenses, education-related expenses incurred due to the Covid-19 pandemic and other financial burdens caused by the pandemic since Mar. 1.

The draft hardship assistance program application was created to ensure all applicants provided enough information to ensure payments comply with the federal CARES Act. Once the Navajo public has given its input and the application has been approved by the HEHSC and BFC of the Navajo Nation Council, the Office of the Controller will take over the implementation and administration of the hardship assistance program.

Council Delegate Eugenia Charles-Newton (Shiprock) also thanked President Nez for enacting the hardship expenditure plan. “Leadership has taken a step in the right direction helping the Diné people across the globe. Stories were shared by many Diné people who were affected by COVID-19. Working together, putting politics aside and putting the people first is always good for the people. We will fight this monster that has taken so many of our Diné people and survive it together, helping each other along the way.”

Delegate Charles-Newton added that the approved funds will assist Navajo people with past due rent, food, wood, pellets, hand sanitizer, masks and related supplies needed to help protect against the coronavirus during the winter.

Also enacted Friday was Resolution No. CS-73-20, the Chapter Distribution Expenditure Plan. That program will provide further assistance on a local Chapter community level and will be administered through the Office of the Controller and the Division of Community Development. Details on the criteria and application process for local Chapters is still being coordinated and more information will be given to administrators and the Navajo public soon.

Council Delegate Mark Freeland (Becenti, Lake Valley, Náhodishgish, Standing Rock, Whiterock, Huerfano, Nageezi, Crownpoint) said, on the enactment of CS-72-20, “Our local Navajo Chapter communities have shown a great amount of leadership during this pandemic. This funding doesn’t just support government operations. The law that was signed by President Nez acknowledges the short time we have left to provide this relief to the Navajo People. We have local champions, and we ask for their help in spreading the word that assistance is available at the Window Rock level and the local level. Even those living beyond the borders of the Navajo Nation, our relatives and family members experiencing a prolonged period of travel restrictions and self-quarantine. There is help being made available.”

The Office of the Controller received added administrative support through the resolution to support the further development of an online portal and to ensure all expenditures are carried out in compliance with the federal CARES Act.

Legislation can be accessed through the Navajo Nation Council’s legislative tracking system, Diné Bibeeshaz’áanii Binaaltsoos (DiBB) at: <http://dibb.nnols.org/>. Digital comments on legislation may be submitted via email to: comments@navajo-nsn.gov.

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