



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Navajo Nation Council takes the lead in addressing issues with the New Mexico Real ID Act

SANTA FE, N.M. – Members of the Navajo Nation Council along with New Mexico State Rep. Sharon Clahchischilliage (Dist. 4 – R) met on Tuesday with New Mexico Taxation and Revenue Department Cabinet Sec. John Monforte, MVD director William Duran, and MVD deputy director Jerry P. Valdez, to develop solutions in response to problems resulting from the implementation of the Real ID Act in the state of New Mexico.

Speaker LoRenzo Bates (Nenahnezad, Newcomb, San Juan, Tiis Tsoh Sikaad, Tse'Daa'Kaan, Upper Fruitland) requested the meeting with the state's top officials after many constituents, particularly elderly Navajo people, began encountering challenges with obtaining identification cards and driver's licenses that comply with the federal Real ID Act standards and requirements.

In 2005, Congress passed the Real ID Act that established minimum-security standards for issuing driver's licenses and identification cards. The federal Act, which is enforced by the Department of Homeland Security, requires states to become compliant by October 2020.

In 2016, when the New Mexico state legislature was considering H.B. 99 to address the Real ID Act, several members of the Council along with Rep. Clahchischilliage and the Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission pushed for an amendment to include language in the bill that allowed certificates of Indian blood to be used to establish one's identity, which was eventually passed and signed into law. In November 2016, the state began issuing ID's and licenses that comply with the federal standards, as well as non-compliant driving authorization cards.

Since then, many Navajo people have encountered problems that have prevented them from obtaining ID's and driver's licenses from local MVD offices. Many either do not have birth certificates or are unable to provide proof of residency because they live in rural areas that do not have street addresses.



PHOTO: Speaker LoRenzo Bates along with Council Delegates Steven Begay, Norman M. Begay, and Leonard Tsoie discussing the Real ID Act with New Mexico Taxation and Revenue Department Cabinet Sec. John Monforte in Santa Fe on Aug. 29, 2017.

Council Delegate Steven Begay (Coyote Canyon, Mexican Springs, Naschitti, Tohatchi, Bahastl'a'a') told the officials that many elderly Navajo people do not have birth certificates due to the fact that many were not born in hospital facilities. To obtain a delayed birth certificate many have to travel to Santa Fe to the state's vital records office, which is the only office that issues birth certificates in the entire state.

"Accessibility for elders is my main concern. I've made three trips with elders to Santa Fe to the state agencies and it takes up to four hours for them to travel here from their remote communities," stated Delegate Steven Begay, who requested the state officials to send mobile units out to Navajo communities periodically to make services more accessible for Navajo people who reside in remote areas.

Sec. Monforte stated that the state agencies are open to any and all recommendations that make it easier for Navajo elders to obtain ID's and driver's licenses. He also noted that MVD offices are now accepting letters from Navajo chapters and utility billing statements to verify the residency of applicants, which has helped to a certain extent, according to Duran.

Council members requested that the state officials establish a standard letter template that all chapters may use for this purpose.

Council Delegate Leonard Tsosie (Baca/Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Counselor, Littlewater, Ojo Encino, Pueblo Pintado, Torreon, Whitehorse

Lake) recommended that the state work with the Navajo Nation's census office to allow for Navajo people to use their census numbers as proof of their identity and/or residency to obtain an ID or drivers license through the state's MVD.

In addition, Delegate Tsosie suggested that the state and the Nation collaborate to host town hall meetings on or near the Navajo Nation to provide Navajo people with a forum and to have state and tribal leadership on hand. He also urged Navajo elders to renew their ID's and driver's licenses before they expire to minimize potential issues.

Rep. Clahchischillage also pointed out that there are inconsistencies at various MVD offices when staff determines whether or not certain documents are acceptable to prove the residency of applicants, and urged the MVD officials to ensure their staff provides consistent information and services.

Speaker Bates, Sec. Monforte, and Duran will coordinate town hall meetings with the proper state and tribal agencies to develop solutions that allow Navajo people to obtain identification cards or driver's licenses that comply with the federal standards.



PHOTO: (from left to right) Council Delegate Norman M. Begay, MVD director William Duran, New Mexico Taxation and Revenue Department Cabinet Sec. John Monforte, Speaker LoRenzo Bates, Council Delegate Leonard Tsosie, Council Delegate Steven Begay, and New Mexico State Rep. Sharon Clahchischillage on Aug. 29, 2017.

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