

**MINUTES
of the
SECOND MEETING
of the
INDIAN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**July 16, 2025
Tohatchi Chapter House
PO Box 287
Tohatchi**

**July 17-18, 2025
Pinedale Chapter House
Milepost 5 Navajo Service Route 11
Church Rock**

The second meeting of the Indian Affairs Committee was called to order by Senator Shannon D. Pinto, chair, on July 16, 2025 at 9:24 a.m. at the Tohatchi Chapter House in Tohatchi.

Present

Sen. Shannon D. Pinto, Chair
Rep. D. Wonda Johnson, Vice Chair
Rep. Michelle Paulene Abeyta
Rep. John Block
Sen. Angel M. Charley (7/16, 7/17)
Rep. Martha Garcia
Rep. Joseph Franklin Hernandez (7/17, 7/18)
Rep. Charlotte Little
Rep. Patricia Roybal Caballero
Sen. William E. Sharer (7/16, 7/17)
Sen. Benny Shendo, Jr.
Rep. Martin R. Zamora

Absent

Sen. Nicholas A. Paul

Advisory Members

Sen. Linda M. López (7/16)
Rep. Stefani Lord (7/16)
Rep. Angelita Mejia
Sen. George K. Muñoz (7/17)
Rep. Debra M. Sariñana
Sen. William P. Soules (7/16)
Rep. Elizabeth "Liz" Thomson

Rep. Rebecca Dow
Rep. Yanira Gurrola
Rep. Patricia A. Lundstrom
Sen. Cindy Nava
Sen. Joshua A. Sanchez

Guest Legislators

Rep. Micaela Lara Cadena (7/16)
Sen. Antoinette Sedillo Lopez (7/16)

(Attendance dates are noted for members not present for the entire meeting.)

Staff

Nicole Waguespack, Researcher, Legislative Council Service (LCS)
Paul Estok, Staff Attorney, LCS
Sheila Keleher, Researcher, LCS

Guests

The guest list is in the meeting file.

Handouts

Handouts and other written testimony are in the meeting file and posted on the legislature's website.

References to Webcast

The time reference noted next to each agenda item in this document is cross-referenced to the webcast of the committee meeting, which can be found at www.nmlegis.gov, under the "Webcast" tab. The presentations made and committee discussions for agenda items can be found on the recorded webcast for this meeting.

Wednesday, July 16 — Tohatchi Chapter House**Welcome and Introductions (9:24 a.m.)**

Senator Pinto welcomed everyone to the meeting. Committee members, staff and audience members introduced themselves.

Welcome and Status Update from Tohatchi Chapter and Other District 14 Chapters (9:49 a.m.)

Elvis Bitsilly, president, Tohatchi Chapter, and Lee Rodgers, vice president, Tohatchi Chapter, provided a brief history of the chapter and the establishment of the Red Willow Farms. One of the chapter's high-priority projects is lighting on United States Highway 491 because of heavy traffic and safety concerns for students, parents and school staff. Ella Wilson, vice chair, Bahast'lah Community Land Use Planning Committee (CLUPC), gave a brief update on the work of the CLUPC and the current projects and concerns of the Bahast'lah Chapter. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=IAC&Date=7/16/2025&ItemNumber=1>.

Public Comment (10:17 a.m.)

A list of individuals making public comment is available in the meeting file.

Tohatchi Tour (11:00 a.m.)

Committee members toured the Tohatchi Senior Center. Mr. Bitsilly led legislators on a driving tour of the Tohatchi Chapter area, which included the Navajo Head Start school, the Ch'ooshgai Community School, the Ch'ooshgai School fire station and the new high school currently under construction.

Public Comment (1:27 p.m.)

A list of individuals making public comment is available in the meeting file.

Alcohol Harms Alleviation Coalition (1:45 p.m.)

Representative Cadena; Senator Sedillo Lopez; and Jennie Wei, M.D., Gallup Indian Medical Center, addressed the issue of alcohol harms from excessive alcohol use. With New Mexico having the highest state rate of alcohol-related mortality in the country since 1997, the impact of alcohol taxes and alcohol control policies was discussed, as well as alcohol tax proposals brought before the legislature in recent years. They discussed the legacies of colonialism, structural violence and intergenerational trauma that have intensified alcohol harms in New Mexico's indigenous populations. The panel emphasized the critical need for broader alcohol harm prevention and more treatment initiatives in the state. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=IAC&Date=7/16/2025&ItemNumber=2>.

Update from Navajo Technical University (NTU) Nursing Program (3:30 p.m.)

Casmir Agbaraji, Ph.D., dean of undergraduate studies, NTU, and Cristina Carpenter, Ph.D., nursing director, NTU, gave an overview of the new nursing program that reopened in 2024, with current funding from the New Mexico Nursing Expansion grant. Dr. Carpenter outlined the program's needs and accomplishments, citing the capability for simulation being a high priority, along with simulators and the necessary faculty training and support. The new nursing program is also in need of additional funding. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=IAC&Date=7/16/2025&ItemNumber=3>.

Motion to Draft Letter of Support (4:04 p.m.)

The committee approved, without objection, a motion to draft a letter of support for the Federal Occupational Health program's Environmental Health and Safety Services team to the Program Support Center of the United States Department of Health and Human Services to expedite the Tohatchi Senior Center's inspection and permit to operate.

Approval of Minutes (4:04 p.m.)

Upon a motion duly made and seconded, and without any objections, the committee approved the minutes of the June 2, 2025 meeting.

Update from Diné College (DC) (4:08 p.m.)

Harley Interpreter, legislative affairs specialist, DC, presented a brief history of the College, which was founded in 1968 as the first tribal college in the country. Having been recently classified as a research institution in the updated Carnegie Classifications of Institutes of Higher Education, Diné College saw a 30% increase in enrollment over the past two years. Kimberly Dominguez, director, Teacher Education Project, DC, gave an overview of the

Northwest New Mexico Teacher Education Program, which was born out of a grant that DC wrote to address many of the deficiencies outlined in the *Yazzie/Martinez v. State of New Mexico* lawsuit from a higher education perspective. The goal of the program is to recruit and develop teachers who have the ability to teach with culturally and linguistically responsive skills. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=IAC&Date=7/16/2025&ItemNumber=4>.

Public Comment (4:56 p.m.)

A list of individuals making public comment is available in the meeting file.

Recess

The meeting recessed at 5:00 p.m.

Thursday, July 17 — Pinedale Chapter House

Reconvene

The meeting reconvened at 9:27 a.m.

Welcome and Status Update from Pinedale Chapter (PC) (9:29 a.m.)

Clara Daye, secretary/treasurer, PC, and Titus Nez, community services coordinator, PC, spoke about the new Navajo tribal library that has recently opened, as well as the chapter's traditional Summer Youth Employment Program. They also discussed a tribal road infrastructure project and internet expansion for community members living in the valley. One high-priority project underway is the establishment of a community cemetery. Megan Yazzie, who is currently crowned Miss Pinedale Community and is employed with the Summer Youth Employment Program, introduced herself to the committee.

New Mexico Redistricting Task Force (11:30 a.m.)

Leonard Gorman, executive director, Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission, gave an overview of the recommendations developed by the 2020 New Mexico First Redistricting Task Force and its goals to support legislation to improve transparency and fairness in the redistricting process. Kathleen Burke, project coordinator, Fair Districts for New Mexico, reviewed the current task force members and the proposed meeting schedule and topics for future discussion. Ms. Burke stated that the 2025 Fair Districts for New Mexico Redistricting Task Force will release a final report by October 15, 2025. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=IAC&Date=7/16/2025&ItemNumber=6>.

Six Directions Indigenous School (12:59 p.m.)

Rebecca Niiha, head administrator, Six Directions Indigenous School, gave an overview of the state-chartered public secondary school, which uses an indigenous-centered model focused on native languages, land-based learning, restorative justice and project-based instruction. Ms.

Niiha also outlined the challenges and obstacles in obtaining capital outlay funding, given that the school does not own the school building. Wilhelmina Yazzie, plaintiff, *Yazzie/Martinez v. State of New Mexico*, joined Ms. Niiha in support of Six Directions Indigenous School. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=IAC&Date=7/16/2025&ItemNumber=7>.

Public Comment (1:40 p.m.)

A list of individuals making public comment is available in the meeting file.

The *Yazzie/Martinez v. State of New Mexico* Lawsuit (1:59 p.m.)

Ms. Yazzie; Melissa Candelaria, education director and attorney, New Mexico Center on Law and Poverty; and Alisa Diehl, senior education attorney, New Mexico Center on Law and Poverty, presented an overview and update of the *Yazzie/Martinez* lawsuit, including the April 2025 ruling that found that New Mexico's public education system is still violating the constitutional rights of at-risk students, including Native American students, English learners, students with disabilities and students from low-income families. The Public Education Department (PED) was ordered to develop a comprehensive plan to correct ongoing constitutional violations. The panel outlined the key components of an action plan identified by plaintiffs for establishing an equitable education system for all students. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=IAC&Date=7/16/2025&ItemNumber=8>.

Update on the Navajo/Gallup Water Supply Project (NGWSP): City of Gallup (4:03 p.m.)

Louis Bonaguidi, mayor, City of Gallup; Frank Chiapetti, city manager, City of Gallup; and Mark DePauli, P.E., P.S., DePauli Engineering and Surveying, LCC, outlined the history of Gallup's long-term reliance on ground water and concerns about declining water levels within aquifers. The panel discussed the ongoing NGWSP and the current challenges the city is facing. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=IAC&Date=7/16/2025&ItemNumber=10>.

Update on the NGWSP: Bureau of Reclamation (4:28 p.m.)

Bart Deming, acting area manager, Western Colorado Area Office, United States Bureau of Reclamation, reviewed the history of the NGWSP and discussed the implementation of the Navajo Nation San Juan River Basin water rights settlement. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=IAC&Date=7/16/2025&ItemNumber=9>.

Human Trafficking in the Transit Industry (5:24 p.m.)

Bernadine Beyale, executive director, 4Corners K-9 Search and Rescue, and Louie Greek, training specialist, Truckers Against Trafficking, gave an overview of efforts to find missing indigenous persons and combat human trafficking, which commonly occurs at truck stops near tribal lands. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=IAC&Date=7/16/2025&ItemNumber=11>.

Public Comment (5:42 p.m.)

A list of individuals making public comment is available in the meeting file.

Recess

The meeting recessed at 5:53 p.m.

Friday, July 18 — Pinedale Chapter House**Reconvene**

The meeting reconvened at 10:07 a.m.

Update on *Yazzie/Martinez v. State of New Mexico* (10:07 a.m.)

Gregory Frostad, assistant secretary of education, PED, and Damian Wierzbicki, deputy director, Indian Education Division, PED, reviewed amendments to the New Mexico Administrative Code implementing the Indian Education Act. Mr. Frostad and Mr. Wierzbicki noted key changes that provide for fixed base funding to every Indian nation, tribe and pueblo and are intended to strengthen tribal sovereignty and local control over the design and implementation of educational programs. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=IAC&Date=7/16/2025&ItemNumber=12>.

Public Comment (11:59 a.m.)

A list of individuals making public comment is available in the meeting file.

Adjournment

There being no further business before the committee, the meeting adjourned at 12:26 p.m.