

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

**October 22, 2025
Canoncito Band of Navajos Health Center
129 Medicine Horse Drive
To'hajiilee**

**October 23-24, 2025
Central New Mexico Community College-Westside
Westside II Building
10549 Universe Boulevard NW
Albuquerque**

The fifth meeting of the Indian Affairs Committee was called to order by Senator Shannon D. Pinto, chair, on October 22, 2025 at 9:15 a.m. at the Canoncito Band of Navajos Health Center in To'hajiilee.

Present

Sen. Shannon D. Pinto, Chair
Rep. Michelle Paulene Abeyta
Rep. John Block
Sen. Angel M. Charley (10/22)
Rep. Joseph Franklin Hernandez
Rep. Charlotte Little
Rep. Patricia Roybal Caballero
Rep. Martin R. Zamora

Advisory Members

Rep. Rebecca Dow (10/22, 10/23)
Sen. Linda M. López (10/22, 10/23)

Absent

Rep. D. Wonda Johnson, Vice Chair
Rep. Martha Garcia
Sen. William E. Sharer
Sen. Benny Shendo, Jr.

Rep. Yanira Gurrola
Rep. Stefani Lord
Rep. Patricia A. Lundstrom
Rep. Angelita Mejia
Sen. George K. Muñoz
Sen. Cindy Nava
Sen. Joshua A. Sanchez
Rep. Debra M. Sariñana
Sen. William P. Soules
Rep. Elizabeth "Liz" Thomson

Guest Legislators

Rep. Joy Garratt (10/22)
Rep. Javier Martínez (10/22)

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

Staff

Nicole Waguespack, Researcher, Legislative Council Service (LCS)
Paul Estok, Staff Attorney, LCS
Gabriel Suazo, Intern, 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, October 22 — Canoncito Band of Navajos Health Center**Welcome and Introductions (9:15 a.m.)**

Senator Pinto welcomed the committee. Members of the committee and staff introduced themselves.

Welcome From and Tour of the Canoncito Band of Navajos Health Center (CBNHC) and To'hajiilee Community (9:32 a.m.)

Ronnie Hurley, president, To'hajiilee Chapter, Navajo Nation; Willinda Castillo, chief school administrator, To'hajiilee Community School; John Billison, interim chief executive officer, CBNHC; and Carolyn Morris, Ph.D., behavioral health director, CBNHC, discussed local issues such as the lack of a local chapter house, no police presence, insufficient social services, no post office and a housing crisis. Committee members and staff toured the CBNHC and To'hajiilee. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=IAC&Date=10/22/2025&ItemNumber=1>.

Update from the Veterans' Services Department (VSD) (1:18 p.m.)

Eric James, deputy secretary, VSD, and Beverly Charley, tribal liaison, VSD, talked about the VSD's dedication to collaborating on any veterans' issues related to New Mexico's Indian nations, tribes and pueblos. The VSD wants to ensure that Native American voices and

needs are heard and respected. Some of the challenges involve demand for updated veterans count data, outreach efforts to tribal lands and frequent turnover in tribal leadership. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=IAC&Date=10/22/2025&ItemNumber=2>.

Strengthening County and Tribal Health Councils for a Healthy New Mexico (2:09 p.m.)

Valeria Alarcón, executive director, New Mexico Alliance of Health Councils (NMAHC); Gerilyn Antonio, tribal liaison, NMAHC; Sarah Bitsui, Ats'íís Naabik'iyáti Health Council coordinator; and Carolyn Morris, Ph.D., behavioral health program director, CBNHC, gave an overview of the NMAHC. The presenters mentioned that there are 33 county and 10 tribal health councils that provide local representation of diverse and underserved communities statewide. Health councils are community health hubs with intimate knowledge of the barriers and challenges their communities face. Some of their services include critical functions of public health statewide, emergency response, prevention and intervention, ensuring access to critical services and health education. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=IAC&Date=10/22/2025&ItemNumber=3>.

Indian Affairs Department: Update on the State-Tribal Collaboration Act and Capital Outlay (3:22 p.m.)

Josett Monette, secretary, Indian Affairs Department, gave an overview on the State-Tribal Collaboration Act and capital outlay. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=IAC&Date=10/22/2025&ItemNumber=4>.

Advancing Native Housing Justice: From Crisis to Stability, Safety and Sovereignty in Tribal, Rural and Urban Communities I (4:40 p.m.)

Dawn Begay, vice president, Cicuye Consulting, and Gwen Packard, tentative director, STTARS Indigenous Safe Housing Center, and program specialist, National Indigenous Women's Resource Center, discussed Albuquerque's gap between Native and white home ownership and spoke about advocacy at tribal, municipal, state and federal levels. Ms. Begay discussed a three-phase plan that includes a mass design fund, preliminary guidance and programming that will help reflect the community's values and close the home ownership equity gap. This also includes collaboration among different entities regarding Native experiences, needs and preferences regarding housing in Albuquerque.

Update from the NACA Inspired Schools Network (NISN) Diné Language Mentor and Apprentice Program (5:37 p.m.)

Geneva Becenti, Ph.D., director, NISN Diné Language Initiatives and Policy Program, gave an overview of the 520 Native American Language and Culture Certification program,

which allows Indian nations, tribes and pueblos in the state to develop and establish criteria for Native language competency that is accepted as college credit. She said the program has certified 92 Diné language teachers who give instruction in 116 Diné language programs or classes in New Mexico. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=IAC&Date=10/22/2025&ItemNumber=6>.

Recess

The meeting recessed at 6:17 p.m.

Thursday, October 23 — Central New Mexico Community College (CNM)-Westside

Reconvene

The meeting reconvened at 9:43 a.m.

Welcome and Status Update from CNM (10:02 a.m.)

Nireata Seals, Ph.D., vice president of enrollment management and student success, CNM, and Felecia Caton-Garcia, Ph.D., executive director, Office of Organizational Culture and Effectiveness, CNM, said CNM is seeking permanent workforce training. Additionally, CNM is working to improve the transfer student experience and financial aid process by creating a system that seamlessly connects CNM students with other colleges. Dr. Caton-Garcia discussed CNM's efforts in providing occupational support, an inclusive culture and community engagement. As a whole, CNM serves 2,100 students who identify as American Indian. Students get guidance through scholarship opportunities, cultural events, credit for prior learning and religious travel.

Santa Fe Indian School (SFIS) Presentation and Project Endorsement (11:18 a.m.)

Christie Abeyta, superintendent, SFIS, and Gary Lujan, director of land grant management, SFIS, talked about the SFIS's amphitheater fund project and discussed previous funding allocations. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=IAC&Date=10/22/2025&ItemNumber=8>.

Approval of Committee Letter and Minutes (11:35 a.m.)

Upon a motion duly made and seconded, the committee approved the committee's October 23, 2025 letter regarding the SFIS's request for \$8 million in state funding to complete the renovation and reconstruction of the school's Paolo Soleri Amphitheater, with amendments.

Upon a motion duly made and seconded, and without any objections, the committee approved the minutes of the September 25-26, 2025 meeting.

New Mexico's Food Banks: Partners in Addressing Hunger and Poverty Across the State (11:39 a.m.)

Jill Dixon, executive director, The Food Depot, and Katy Anderson, vice president of strategy, partnerships and advocacy, Roadrunner Food Bank, presented on the activities of food banks to address hunger and poverty across New Mexico and discussed the importance of strong safety net programs to help people meet basic needs and create healthier, more resilient communities. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=IAC&Date=10/22/2025&ItemNumber=9>.

Advancing Native Housing Justice: From Crisis to Stability, Safety and Sovereignty in Tribal, Rural and Urban Communities II (2:00 p.m.)

Dawn Begay, vice president, Cicuye Consulting; and Chenoa Bah Stilwell-Jensen, Ph.D., Southwest Indigenous Housing Justice and Diné regional health officer, Health Sciences Center, University of New Mexico, stated that Native families face some of the nation's highest rates of overcrowding, substandard housing and homelessness due to workforce shortages, safety gaps and limited access to land for development. The presenters noted that systematic barriers to homeownership and wealth accumulation continue to widen the racial wealth gap, extending intergenerational inequities in Native American communities. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=IAC&Date=10/22/2025&ItemNumber=11>.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Tour of Public Safety Programs at CNM-Westside — Fire Science and Law Enforcement (3:46 p.m.)

Members of the committee and staff toured CNM-Westside's public safety programs.

Recess

The meeting recessed at 3:46 p.m.

Friday, October 24 — CNM-Westside

Reconvene

The meeting reconvened at 9:35 a.m.

Overview of the Native American Professional Parent Resources (NAPPR) Organization (9:36 a.m.)

Elaine Sanchez, executive director, NAPPR, stated that NAPPR has four different programs, which serve 700 individuals per month in New Mexico, southern Colorado and El

Paso, Texas. The organization's goal is to support and work with young children and families by providing lifelong well-being through such services as risk assessments, health screenings, education, resources, supplies and therapies. All of the NAPPR's services are free and are designed to help children aged 0 to 3, pregnant people and Native and non-Native Americans. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=IAC&Date=10/22/2025&ItemNumber=12>.

Update and Request from the Tribal Homeownership Coalition of the Southwest (THOCSW) (10:51 a.m.)

Christopher Billey, executive director, THOCSW, discussed adult home buyer certificate programs in at least 10 tribal communities. The THOCSW collaborates with high schools to provide homeownership training in at least five schools serving large tribal populations. The coalition delivers leadership development for a minimum of 50 tribal housing and homeownership professionals and tribal leaders and staff with the goal of strengthening tribal capacity for accurate housing data collection and analysis to inform policy and investment. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=IAC&Date=10/22/2025&ItemNumber=13>.

Public Comment (12:04 p.m.)

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

Adjournment

There being no further business before the committee, the meeting adjourned at 12:35 p.m.