

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

**September 25-26, 2025  
Alamo Chapter House  
#10  
Alamo**

The fourth meeting of the Indian Affairs Committee was called to order by Senator Shannon D. Pinto, chair, at 9:55 a.m. on September 25, 2025 at the Alamo Chapter House in Alamo.

**Present**

Sen. Shannon D. Pinto, Chair  
Rep. D. Wonda Johnson, Vice Chair (9/26)  
Rep. Michelle Paulene Abeyta  
Rep. John Block  
Sen. Angel M. Charley  
Rep. Martha Garcia  
Rep. Joseph Franklin Hernandez  
Rep. Martin R. Zamora

**Absent**

Rep. Charlotte Little  
Sen. Nicholas A. Paul  
Rep. Patricia Roybal Caballero  
Sen. William E. Sharer  
Sen. Benny Shendo, Jr.

**Advisory Members**

Rep. Rebecca Dow  
Rep. Yanira Gurrola  
Sen. Linda M. López  
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

(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](http://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.

## **Thursday, September 25**

### **Welcome and Introductions (9:55 a.m.)**

Senator Pinto welcomed the committee, and members of the committee and LCS staff introduced themselves.

### **Welcome and Status Update from Alamo Chapter House (10:15 a.m.)**

Nigel Secatero, vice president, Alamo Chapter, and Yvette Betone, secretary/ treasurer, Alamo Chapter, welcomed the committee and discussed the chapter's needs, including pavement of roads and border fencing, assistance with a drug rehabilitation facility, local law enforcement to address high rates of drug use and a police substation for when people are apprehended.

Joseph Pies, grant and contract officer, The Alamo Navajo School Board, Inc., and Rick Padilla, president, The Alamo Navajo School Board, Inc., spoke on the needs of the Alamo Chapter and discussed wastewater management and community needs such as electricity, housing and water.

Cecil Abeyta, member, The Alamo Navajo School Board, Inc., discussed improvements in test scores, graduation rates and the increased number of students pursuing higher education in the state. Additionally, Mr. Abeyta mentioned that if education were to close in Alamo, new schools would have to open in Magdalena, and the state would have to provide transportation for students. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=IAC&Date=9/25/2025&ItemNumber=1>.

### **Update from the New Mexico Tribal Entrepreneurship Enhancement Program (NMTEEP) (11:12 a.m.)**

Cecilia Becenti, economic development specialist, NMTEEP, UNM Rainforest Innovations, University of New Mexico (UNM), discussed the NMTEEP's goal to create more

opportunities, wealth and job growth by enhancing entrepreneurship in tribal communities across New Mexico, in particular for people struggling with coal mine closures.

Lisa Kuuttila, chief executive officer and chief economic development officer, UNM Rainforest Innovations, UNM, mentioned that UNM Rainforest Innovations realized that it was underrepresenting a segment of people in the Native American population. Therefore, the City of Santa Fe partnered with UNM Rainforest Innovations to hire a funding liaison that could help grow the economy in tribal communities. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=IAC&Date=9/25/2025&ItemNumber=2>.

#### **Update from the Gaming Control Board (GCB) (11:37 a.m.)**

Van Billops, C.P.A., interim state gaming representative, GCB, gave an overview of tribal gaming regulations. Mr. Billops also discussed exclusion lists, which encourage responsible gaming initiatives, and the need for collaborative work with tribes to provide education, prevention and treatment of gaming addiction. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=IAC&Date=9/25/2025&ItemNumber=3>.

#### **The Early Childhood Education and Care Department (ECECD) Sacred Beginnings Learning Tour (1:15 p.m.)**

Joannie Suina, Ed.D., assistant secretary for Native American early childhood education and care, ECECD, spoke about the 243 scholarships that were awarded to Native American students pursuing early childhood education degrees in fiscal year 2025. Additionally, 170 indigenous and bilingual students received \$1,500 stipends for higher education pathways. New Mexico has a number of Native American early childhood education programs, including on the Jicarilla Apache Nation, the Pueblo of Sandia and the Navajo Nation. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=IAC&Date=9/25/2025&ItemNumber=4>.

#### **How Heat and Other Extreme Weather Events Impact Public Health (2:09 p.m.)**

Shelley Mann-Lev, M.P.H., executive director, Healthy Climate New Mexico (HCNM); Christine Dobbin, M.P.H., member, Board of Directors, HCNM; and Charles Goodmacher, M.A., policy advisor, HCNM, mentioned that New Mexico is one of the states that is rapidly getting hotter. They discussed research that shows that when temperatures exceed 86 degrees Fahrenheit, health impacts and emergency department visits increase across New Mexico. Rural isolation significantly compounds heat vulnerability due to substantial distances to health care facilities and longer response times for emergency services. For this reason, HCNM helped to

develop the Climate Adaptation and Resilience Plan, in anticipation of extreme heat, wildfires, droughts, storms and health risks. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=IAC&Date=9/25/2025&ItemNumber=5>.

**Northern New Mexico Climate and Traditions and the Impact of Climate Change on Traditional Ways of Life (2:57 p.m.)**

Stephanie Moraga-McHaley, M.S., member, Board of Directors, HCNM, and Melissa Riley, Ph.D., member, Board of Directors, Native Community Development Associate, HCNM, discussed climate and health in New Mexico, including the West Nile Virus and its impact in the Native American community. Additionally, Ms. Moraga-McHaley and Ms. Riley spoke on the impacts of climate change on Native American ways of life, stating that sacred sites and ceremonial practices face increasing risks from extreme weather, drought, wildfires and shifting seasonal cycles. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=IAC&Date=9/25/2025&ItemNumber=6>.

**Public Comment (4:00 p.m.)**

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

**Recess**

The meeting recessed at 4:09 p.m.

**Friday, September 26**

**Reconvene**

The meeting reconvened at 9:46 a.m.

**Overview of Cross-Commissioning (9:47 a.m.)**

Mr. Estok gave an overview of cross-commissioning of law enforcement officers and mutual aid agreements.

**Economic Impact and History of Tribal Gaming in New Mexico (10:18 a.m.)**

James Rivera, president, Cornerstone Group, LLC, and Frank Chaves, chair, New Mexico Indian Gaming Association, presented a letter sent to United States Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell on July 29, 2003 related to the hearing from the same year on the federal Indian Gaming Regulatory Act. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=IAC&Date=9/25/2025&ItemNumber=8>.

**Federal Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) Accommodations for State Employees (11:32 a.m.)**

Sunny Gonzales, union steward, Communications Workers of America (CWA) Local 7076; Megan Green, president, Executive Board, CWA 7076; and Dylan Pell, agency vice president, Department of Health, CWA 7076, discussed how the CWA's disability committee was initiated in September of 2024. Through research, the CWA noted extreme delays in implementation of the ADA, a denial of accommodations, a lack of safety procedures and inaccessible facilities, among other issues. The CWA's goal is to remove barriers related to disabilities to ensure people's success.

**Approval of Minutes (12:15 p.m.)**

Upon a motion duly made and seconded, and without any objections, the committee approved the minutes of the August 14-15, 2025 meeting.

**Public Comment (12:15 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 12:31 p.m.