

Statement by the Diné Hataalii Association

December 16, 2020

We write in support for the original first responders, the Diné Hataalii and traditional practitioners and spiritual leaders of the Navajo Nation. Spiritual leaders and traditional practitioners are sought out in times of illness, hardship, fear and anxiety and that has remained true during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In June 2020, the Diné Hataalii Association (DHA) requested CARES Act relief funding. The proposal requested \$1 million which was approved by the Navajo Nation Council but then vetoed by the Office of the Navajo Nation President and Vice President (OPVP). Eventually, the Navajo Nation Council and OPVP approved \$2 million to be distributed to spiritual organizations (traditional and non-traditional).

The DHA and other spiritual leaders met twice with the Navajo Nation Department of Health (NDOH) leaders; and at a meeting held September 30, 2020, Navajo Nation (NN) leadership confirmed that each organization would receive \$600,000 of CARES Act “hardship” funds while \$200,000 would be reserved for those not members of the spiritual groups. Despite several email inquiries, face-to-face visits with NDOH leadership, we have yet to receive a response to our requests. To date, we have not received any allocated hardship funds. The lack of response is a disregard and disrespect for our traditional Diné Hataalii, and is unacceptable. The NN leadership is expected to abide by the Diné Fundamental Laws, but that has not happened.

To remedy these injustices, we request the NN Office of the Controller immediately disperse the allocated hardship funds to DHA members. An apology is also in order for the lack of inclusiveness by the NN leadership in prioritizing our most treasured wisdom keepers. We look forward to meeting with NN President and Vice President and the Department of Health Director in the immediate future to resolve these issues.

We extend gratitude to our NN leaders and council delegates, specifically Honorable Daniel Tso and Honorable Carl Slater for advancing our concerns. We are also pleased that the Hataalii have been recognized as essential healthcare providers so they can be vaccinated with the Tier 1A group.

On Behalf of our Hataalii and Spiritual and Traditional Wisdom Keepers,
Dr. David Johns
President
Diné Hataalii Association