



# The Navajo Nation

Yideeskáądi Nitsáhákees

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## Navajo President Buu Nygren signs legislation to change name of Social Services to Navajo Division for Children and Family Services

**WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.** – Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren remembers a time he was visiting Dilkon to inspect bathroom additions that little kids were afraid of him.

“Are you going to take me from my *chei* and my grandma?” he said they asked.

They thought he was from the Division of Social Services which they associated with kids being taken away from their homes.

“This new name is going to change their perspectives on what the Division for Children and Family Services is all about,” he said today at the division’s name change ceremony.

“It’s about helping them. It’s about strengthening them so that they can have a future that we can all enjoy.”

The name change was a long time coming, said Thomas Cody, division director.

“We need to ensure that the changes that we put in place will continue, 8-to-10 years from now,” he said. “It can’t just be this administration anymore. We need the oversight committees.”



*Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren today signed legislation to official change the name of the Navajo Nation Division of Social Services to the Division for Children and Family Services. The name aligns with thinking for the future, he said.*

The change was approved by the Navajo Nation Council during its summer session last week.

He said the Division for Children and Family Services is the tribe’s leader for social well-being.

"We needed a new name so the people know clearly who we are and what we do," he said. "It's simple."

The division offers services through the Department of Child Care and Development, Department



of Family Services, Department for Self-Reliance, Indian Child Welfare Act Program, Treatment Center for Children and their Families, Development Disabilities and the Family Assistance Service Program.

OPVP Chief of Staff Patrick Sandoval said one of the reasons there are so many

disparities and inequalities on the Navajo Nation is a lack of a thriving economy.

"We don't have jobs, we don't have housing, we don't have educational systems that count on one another to stay supportive," he said. "We don't have the system to raise a family and be healthy."

Because of that, he said the division's employees "are a critical component to a healthy Navajo Nation."

"The changes that are planned for by President Nygren are generational changes," Sandoval said. "The very same problems we have here are all across the country. It's just that they're less noticeable. Governments have more resources to help take care of the people."

Cody said the name change was of an intense and strategic process to gather input from division staff

in all areas of service and launched by the division's strategic planning process back in 2019.

"The name change was not a whim decision," he said. "It was developed inclusively by the staff."

He said it was needed because the staff didn't think the previous name reflected the services the division offered or stood for.

"The public could not see us providing anything beyond protective services," he said.

Sherylene Yazzie, deputy director of the Navajo Nation Department of Health, said the reason for the division is to assist Navajo individuals, parents, children and families to heal.

"We believe that Navajos healing Navajos says a lot, from the baby to the *masani*," she said. "You have little kids at five years old going out there. Their first chore is to feed your animals, feed your livestock. We need to reembrace who we are as *Diné*."

Renaming the division aligns with its services of case management, financial benefits, career development, childcare services, protective services, counseling, crisis intervention, family reunification and the message, *Yidees'kq̄qdí Nitsáhákees Niha' Áłchíní Bá* – future thinking for our children," Cody said.

Now, President Nygren said, the name fits the job.

"This name is aligned with thinking for the future," he said. "I'm glad that it got done. The former name didn't represent the work the staff does on a day-to-day basis. In order to overcome some of the tremendous challenges the Nation faces, it starts with the family. If our family units are strong, our Nation is strong."

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