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## News Release

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### **Passage of New Mexico HB-0178 Urged to Ease Regulatory Burden on Students Seeking Counseling Licensure**

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – A New Mexico legislature bill, HB-0178, that removes a major counseling and therapy licensure barrier for students who complete an Associate degree in Human Services, is on its way to the NM Senate floor.

On Jan. 25, 2021, Representative Wonda Johnson (D-Gallup) introduced HB-0178, Counseling and Therapy Licensure, a bill to amend the Counseling and Therapy Practice Act. Rose Graham, director of the Office of Navajo Nation Scholarship and Financial Assistance, is hopeful the bill is approved before the New Mexico legislature adjourns on March 20, 2021.

The bill received a do pass recommendation by the NM Senate Tax, Business, and Transportation Committee on Tuesday evening.

“The Navajo Nation has a vested interest in HB-0178,” Ms. Graham said. “We are aware that Navajo students, who have completed counseling-related Associate level degrees programs, including Human Services, are being forced to wait several months for licensure.

In years past, the New Mexico Counseling and Therapy Licensing Board accepted “human services” and “family services” degrees as a “counseling-related field” and issued the LSAA (Licensed Substance Abuse Associate) licensure to qualified applicants. In 2016, due to a stricter interpretation of the Act, which only includes “human family studies” along with art therapy, as degrees that can be used to obtain a drug and alcohol counseling license, staff could no longer accept Human Services as a counseling-related degree.

“Applicants are issued administrative denials and forced to appeal and wait months for the board to meet and consider their appeals for licensure. In the meantime, there is a great need for licensed counselors throughout New Mexico, including the Navajo Nation,” Ms. Graham said. “Also, nowhere in New Mexico does a college offer an Associate degree termed, ‘Human Studies.’ ”

The Navajo Nation currently funds 87 students, including five graduate students, seeking counseling-related degrees at the University of New Mexico, Central New Mexico, New Mexico Highlands University and Eastern New Mexico University.

“Some of students are now working as Substance Abuse Counselors and working on their Bachelor or Master degrees,” Ms. Graham said. “For our Navajo students, earning the Associate degree and entering the workforce is an important first step in their careers and bringing positive change to the Navajo Nation and surrounding communities.”

“We hope the New Mexico legislature takes action on HB-0178 before it adjourns,” Ms. Graham said. “The bill eases a regulatory burden on college graduates perfectly qualified to serve as counselors and drug and alcohol counselors.”