



## The Navajo Nation Office of the Controller

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Controller's Office working quickly to fix application issues, launching text messaging service as means of communication**

**WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.** — As of Dec. 10, three weeks remain until the deadline to spend down CARES Act funds, which includes the Navajo CARES Act Hardship Assistance Program. The Navajo Nation Office of the Controller is tirelessly working to contact applicants that have outstanding issues or exceptions with their applications.

The Support Center has been busy making calls to applicants primarily focused on addressing critical exceptions for applicants that are not able to be identified within the vital records database. These errors, if left unresolved, will prevent individuals from receiving funds based on the program eligibility requirements and federal guidelines.

Navajo Nation Controller Pearline Kirk explained they cleared 50,000 critical exceptions in the last month but approximately 30,000 individuals remain to be validated as enrolled members based on comparing their Certificate of Indian Blood (CIB) with the current vital records database.

More than 290,000 Navajo Nation members applied for the Navajo CARES Act Hardship Assistance Program and as a result, 50,000 new records were added to the Navajo Nation vital records database in less than 30 days. More than 6,000 CIB images were also processed through the text messaging option in the final week of the application period.

"We are working around the clock to validate and add records to the vital records database," said Kirk. "Fortunately, at the conclusion of this program, our census database will include these newly added members, bringing us closer to an accurate and complete database."

As another means of communication, beginning Dec. 11, the Controller's Office will send automated text messages to applicants that have a CIB or date of birth that is not currently in the vital records database. The text message will indicate that the message is coming from the Navajo CARES Act Hardship Assistance Program's Support Center and will state they currently do not have enough information to process their application. Do not reply to this phone number, you must only text message a copy of your CIB to (928) 492-6080. If you receive this text message, text "Hardship" to the number and follow the prompts. You should only send one image at a time.

If applicants are unsure about the accuracy of their application, they can proactively send in a copy of their CIB and other CIBs listed on their application via text message to ensure their applications are processed timely.

An automated call out option will also be launched to those applicants who are unable to receive text messages in addition to the current support center direct outreach.

“Every effort will be made to correct these exceptions prior to Dec. 30 but priority is being placed on those applicants that have critical exceptions like issues relative to their CIB and date of birth,” said Kirk. “We want to ensure the largest number of eligible applicants receive their hardship distribution.”

“Given the large volume of exceptions, the Office of the Controller is using all measures available to reach the largest number of individuals to ensure participation in the program,” added Kirk. “We appreciate your patience as we continue to attempt to confirm enrollment of nearly 25% of the Navajo population who were not previously recognized in the vital records database through no fault of their own.”

All eligibility determinations must be made before the federal CARES Act deadline in order for funding to be allocated to the applicant. Eligibility determinations include being an enrolled member of the Navajo Nation, documented hardship and have accurate date of birth recorded.

“While this may delay payments slightly, we believe it to be the fairest way to administer the Hardship Assistance Program for the benefit of all Navajo Nation enrolled members who have experienced hardship,” Kirk said.

Checks will be cut subsequent to Dec. 30 based on the federal liquidation period to make payment which is up to 90 days. The Controller's Office expects to cut checks to all applicants that have been processed without exception in early January 2021.

“We will continue to work other types of exceptions that do not impact eligibility into January, if necessary, to ensure an accurate distribution,” Kirk added.

The Support Center will continue with phone calls to applicants as well. When calling applicants, Call Center staff will always identify themselves and they will never ask for your full Social Security number. The call will come from the phone number (833) 282-7248. If you do receive a phone call from an unknown number, do not provide any information to them because there has been reports of fraudulent calls. Hang up immediately and call (833) 282-7248 to confirm the legitimacy of the call.

The Support Center will have reduced staff from Dec. 21 to Jan. 3 due to the holidays, so it is important application issues are addressed as soon as possible for processing.

For further questions about the CARES Act Hardship Assistance Program, email [NNCaresHelp@nnooc.org](mailto:NNCaresHelp@nnooc.org).

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