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Office of the Principal Chief

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November 4, 2026

TO: Shella Bowlin, Secretary of State
FR: Chuck Hoskin, Jr, Principal Chief
CC: Dr. Corey Bunch, Chief of Staff
Janees Taylor, Treasurer of the Cherokee Nation
Brittany Denny-Davis, Executive Director of Human Services
Canaan Duncan, Deputy Secretary of State
Council Leadership
Bryan Warner, Deputy Chief

Administration Memorandum Expanding and Enhancing the Elders in Need Program and Elder Nutrition Sites Using Funds Available Under the Public Health and Wellness Fund Act

The purpose of this memorandum is to direct the Secretary of State to expand and enhance the Elders in Need Program and to further expand and enhance the Elder Nutrition Program utilizing funds available under the Public Health and Wellness Fund Act, as amended.

Background and Basis of Review

Cherokee Nation, by the Human Services department, operates the Elder Nutrition Program at sites across the reservation. In 2025, on the heels of expanding the program to Stilwell, I directed an expansion and enhancement of the program using funds under the PHWFA. The FY 2026 and FY 2027 PHWFA spending framework includes funding for the expansion and enhancement of the Elder Nutrition Program. Other elements of the annual spending framework are also available to enhance and expand the program, including the PHW Partners Grant for third-party program operators and the PHW Wellness Capital fund for capital projects on Cherokee Nation owned property.

Cherokee Nation, by its Human Services Department, has operated the Elders in Need program since fiscal year 2012. The program operates as an add on to funds provided in addition to the federally funded Cherokee Nation LIHEAP participants, making payments totaling $400 direct to household utility providers of a participating elders choice. The program, essentially unchanged since its inception, serves around 1,400 Cherokee Nation elders aged 60 and up living in the reservation.

Inflationary pressures bear down harshly on elders with fixed incomes. Automobile gasoline prices have soared during the past year, exceeding 34.2%. Electric utility costs over the last decade have increased more than 30%. Grocery prices rose dramatically during the COVID-19 pandemic, more than 32%. The grocery price hikes had substantial staying power that continues burdening all consumers, particularly low fixed income consumers like most Cherokee elders.

Meanwhile, the EIN program has lost half its value since the $400 annual payment amount was set in 2012 due to inflation. Although our rapid expansion of elder nutrition sites has greatly benefited participating elders, the program remains out of reach to many. Both programs afford this Administration an opportunity to ease economic pressure on more of our elders.

The Public Health and Wellness Fund Act, as amended, authorizes expenditures of third-party health revenue through the Public Health and Wellness Fund (aka 10% fund) for Public Health and Wellness Infrastructure and Activities. The act provides a non-exhaustive list of such activities, which includes food security, housing and "any other activity that supports improvements to public health or behavioral health as determined by the Principal Chief.

Both programs subject of this memo fall within the meaning of "public health activities and infrastructure" within the meaning of the act. "Housing" under PHWFA must include the operations of systems indispensable to safe and sanitary housing, including public utilities. On that basis, and with my determination that easing utility cost motivates housing detriments among low-income elders within the reservation, expansion and enhancement of the EIN program using the PHWFA is warranted. Likewise, the Elder Nutrition Program provides free and nutritious meals to tribal elders. On that basis expanding and enhancing the Elder Nutrition Program using the PHWFA is warranted.

Directive

To effectuate the purposes and policies of PHWFA the Secretary of State shall take immediate steps, in coordination with the Executive Director of Human Services, to expand and enhance the Elders in Need (EIN) Program Elder Nutrition Program consistent with this memorandum. The Secretary shall access funds available under the PHWFA annual spending framework or surplus under the authority of the PHWFA, the FY 2027 PHWFA Spending Framework and this memorandum.

Elders in Need: $2 million Annual Increase to increase participation by 200% and Increase Benefits by 50%

EIN shall immediately:

- Increase benefits by 50%, increasing EIN payments from $400 to $600 per participant per fiscal year.
- Expand eligibility for Cherokee Nation citizens 60 years and older residing within the reservation by the following application of categorical eligibility, such expansion estimated to increase participation from 1400 to 4200 (200%).
- Cherokee Nation LIHEAP participant, or
- Cherokee Nation Food Distribution participant, or
- Only in the case of citizens living in areas excluded from Food Distribution, those citizens participating in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or such comparable eligibility element as the Executive Director may determine by policy.

The Executive Director of Human Services shall draft, and the Secretary shall approve policies and procedures, and recommend a public outreach plan, immediately.

Elder Nutrition: $2.5m to establish four new sites and enhance three existing sites

In Fiscal Year 2027, Human Services shall:

Expand sites to the following communities:

- Catoosa
- Salina
- Tahlequah
- Locust Grove (through a PHW Elder Nutrition Partners Grant with Cherokee Elders Council, Inc., on an annual basis)

Enhance the following existing sites through remodel or expansion:

- Oaks
- Foyil
- Porum

Effective Date: November 4, 2026

Chuck Hoskin, Jr.
Principal Chief

CONCURRENCE

Bryan Warner
Deputy Principal Chief