

EA minimum salary advances

Written by gallupsun
Tuesday, 07 March 2023 11:19

Dear Editor,

This week starts with positive news for three pieces of legislation and not-so-positive news for another bill.

House Bills 127, 236, and 403 moved forward since our last update, and unfortunately, House Bill 417 remained in committee due to a tied vote during its hearing. (More on these bills below.)

Additionally, we expect the Senate version of House Bill 2 (the FY '24 budget) to be unveiled soon, and as part of that process, we wanted to highlight a “generic bill” that's been filed and is scheduled to be heard March 8, specifically Senate Bill 521, which would increase the current proposed pay raises from an average of 5% to an average of 6% for public employees. While this 1% increase is not yet set in stone, it is encouraging to see the enabling legislation be scheduled for a hearing this week.

What is a “generic bill?” A generic bill is essentially a blank piece of legislation with a broad title that is introduced and assigned to legislative leaders (majority/minority caucus leaders, committee chairs, etc.) before the cutoff to introduce legislation. This way, when a need arises for a piece of legislation *after* the cutoff for legislative introduction, these generic bills can be amended and still comply with New Mexico statute.

MARCH 4

House Judiciary Committee

House Bill 236, led by Rep. Eleanor Chavez and co-sponsored by Reps. Borrego, Castellano, Gurrola, Roybal Caballero, Rubio, and Sen. McKenna, would initiate a process for New Mexico to establish safe staffing parameters in our hospitals.

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HB 236 is important as it would boost patient care levels by lessening the case loads of nurses and other healthcare professionals, and it would also help to lessen the burnout experienced by our healthcare workers.

AFT New Mexico is partnering with NUHHCE District 1199 to promote and advocate for this legislation. HB 236 was debated March 4 after House Judiciary Committee members heard public comment March 3. After a short debate, HB 236 was passed 6-2 and now advances to the full House of Representatives.

MARCH 6

House Education Committee

House Bill 403, carried by Rep. Joy Garratt and Sen. Leo Jaramillo, seeks to institute a multiplier factor to higher education institutions to help adjunct and contingent faculty earn Public Service Loan Forgiveness on a quicker timetable. The act requires higher education institutions to calculate an instructor's full-time status by multiplying the number of credit hours or student contact hours by a minimum of 4.35 so that an instructor teaching one three-credit hour course would be credited with 13.05 hours of work for the purpose of calculating eligibility for the public service loan forgiveness program.

AFT NM supports HB 403 and has partnered with the Student Borrowers Protection Center on this legislation, and it has previously passed the House Labor, Military, and Veterans Affairs Committee. During the morning of March 7, HB 403/a was passed unanimously by members of the House Education Committee. It now heads to the full House of Representatives.

House Bill 417, carried by Reps. Trujillo, Roybal Caballero, Gurrola, and Chavez, would establish a minimum salary for adjunct faculty in New Mexico at \$52,000 for full-time workload. (Less than full-time would be pro-rated under the legislation.) This legislation is an acknowledgement and recognition of the work provided by adjunct faculty in our institutions of higher education as these institutions rely on non-tenured instructors more every year.

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AFT NM supports HB 417, and United Academics of UNM President Ernesto Longa served as expert witness during this bill's hearing. Unfortunately, HB 417 failed to advance March 7 due to a tied vote. A concern about HB 417 that was raised was the lack of funding in the budget for enacting the bill. On a more positive note, Secretary of Higher Education, Stephanie Rodriguez spoke in support of the legislation and her desire to work with all stakeholders to keep this effort moving forward.

Senate Finance Committee

House Bill 127 is an effort to raise the minimum wage for educational assistants/instructional assistants and their role group to \$25,000/year. It is sponsored by Reps. Susan Herrera, Brian Baca, Willie Madrid, Debbie Sariñana, Christine Trujillo, Patricia Roybal Caballero, Lu is Terrazas, Liz Thomson, and Sens. Mimi Stewart and Linda Lopez.

As we reported last week, our union was able to secure funding in House Bill 2 (the FY '24 budget) to fund these minimums, and the entire House of Representatives adopted those budgetary recommendations before sending House Bill 2 to the Senate.

Even though the funds for HB 127 are in the current version of the budget, advancing HB 127 is necessary so these newly won minimums are permanently in statute. Members of the Senate Finance Committee advanced HB 127 unanimously March 6. The legislation now heads to the full Senate for consideration.

AFT NM-supported Legislation on Final Third Reading:

(These are bills which are on a final action before being sent to the governor.)

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- House Bill 126/a – HS Graduation Redesign
- House Bill 181 – National Board Certification Units
- House Bill 127 – Educational Assistant Minimum Salary

MARCH 8

House Bill 245, carried by Reps. Chavez, Anyanonu, Gurrola, and Roybal Caballero, would ban disciplinary or retaliatory actions against employees who decline to attend a captive audience meeting, typically used by employers to discourage unionization efforts in both private and public sector union representation drives. These tactics have been recently used to discourage many retail workers, including those at Starbucks, Trader Joe's, and REI, but New Mexico workers have also been subjected to similar tactics.

AFT New Mexico strongly supports HB 245, and it previously passed the House Labor, Veterans, and Military Affairs Committee.

Senate Bill 521, carried by Sens. Muñoz and Stewart, would add an additional 1% to the proposed salary increases to the FY '24 budget. This would represent a 6% average increase in salary for the FY '24 fiscal year. SB 521 explicitly states this additional 1% is an attempt to acknowledge both inflation and anticipated increased healthcare costs.

AFT New Mexico supports this legislation and will continue to lobby for wage increases for the educators we represent.

Sincerely,

Whitney Holland

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President, NM American Federation of Teachers

