

EA minimum salary receives unanimous support

Written by gallupsun
Saturday, 25 February 2023 12:15

Dear Editor,

At the close of the sixth week of the legislative session, we are pleased to report that many of our union's priority legislation continues to move forward. There are still three weeks to go, and many things can change, but we continue to make progress every day by advocating, educating, and agitating for the positive policies that help our students, profession, and communities.

Part of why we continue to make progress has been the efforts of our AFT NM locals who have taken the time to lobby their representatives on the issues that matter to their constituency and community.

Our latest local to lobby were the AFT NM Retirees, who were in the Roundhouse advocating for funding for the NM Retiree Healthcare Authority, which provides healthcare coverage for NM educational retirees, among others. In fact, a full 10% of all New Mexicans benefit from this critical fund. Thank you, Retirees, for your activism!

FEB. 23

House of Representatives

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, Luis 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.

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Even though the funds for enacting HB 127 are in the current version of the budget, advancing HB 127 is necessary so these newly won minimums are permanently in statute. HB 127 passed the NM House of Representatives UNANIMOUSLY on Feb. 23.

House Labor, Veterans, and Military Affairs 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. It passed the House Labor, Veterans, and Military Affairs Committee on a vote of 6-2. It now heads to the House Education Committee.

FEB. 24

House of Representatives

The House of Representatives considered HB 151, carried by Reps. Christine Trujillo and Patricia Roybal Caballero on Feb. 24. HB 151 seeks to grant access to unemployment benefits for adjunct and contingent faculty when their class schedules are abruptly cancelled. Currently, this group of educators do not have access to unemployment benefits in these scenarios.

AFT New Mexico supports this legislation and testified in support of HB 151 throughout its legislative journey. Higher Education members from the United Academics of UNM have also added critical testimony in support of this legislation. HB 151 passed the House of

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Representatives on a vote of 40-25. The legislation now heads to the Senate for consideration.

FEB. 27

Senate Education Committee

House Bill 181, carried by Reps. Joanne Ferrary, Debbie Sariñana, Trujillo, and Sen. Bill Soules, was advanced by a vote of 66-2 this earlier this week by the members of the House of Representatives.

The legislation seeks to expand the definition and eligibility of Nationally Board-Certified Teachers to receive a differential for their certification. If enacted, HB 181 would extend differential eligibility to NBCT counselors and administrators with a current certification.

HB 181 will be heard in the Senate Education Committee Feb. 27. It was scheduled to be heard Feb. 24; however, the committee ran out of time before needing to report to the Senate floor.

House Bill 126/a, sponsored by Reps. G. Andres Romero and T. Ryan Lane, seeks to adjust the state requirements for high school graduation. This legislation is a result of the work of the Legislative Education Study Committee, and our union has been part of the conversation and feedback as this bill has been developed.

Most notably, HB 126/a would remove the Algebra II requirement for graduation and allow local school districts to establish two local units for graduation which fit the needs of their community. The re-worked graduation requirements also allow for greater inclusion of career technical education as part of a student's pathway to graduation.

The House of Representatives previously passed this legislation 64-3. We believe that with

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greater flexibility and local decision-making in structuring what a graduating high school senior looks like, we can keep more students in school, reduce absences, and increase graduation rates by offering classes that appeal to our students.

Sincerely,

Whitney Holland

President, NM American Federation of Teachers

