

Gov. Lujan Grisham signs bills into law

Written by Staff Reports
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Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham has been busy signing bills from the 2020 legislative session into law.

Among those bills is Senate Bill 99 which authorizes public schools to grant diplomas to Viet Nam veterans who were honorably discharged and whose entry into the service prevented them from graduating from a N. M. high school. Signed into law on March 6, the diploma can be awarded whether the veteran holds a high school equivalency credential or is deceased. SB 99, sponsored by Sen. George Muñoz, D-Cibola, McKinley and San Juan, will allow local school boards to start processing and authenticating high school diploma requests from Viet Nam veterans July 1.

On March 6, the governor signed SB 136 into law. It allows the State Investment Council to raise the cap from 9 to 11 per cent on investments from the Severance Tax Permanent Fund into the state's Private Equity Investment Program where it finds good opportunities. It targets startup companies with the potential for fast growth and job creation and has already invested in 73 companies which spend \$42 million a year on goods and services in the state.

The governor hopes the measure will attract investment partners and expertise from outside the state. The bill was sponsored by Sen. Pete Campos, D-Colfax, Guadalupe, Harding, Mora, Quay, San Miguel and Taos, and passed the Senate 30-9 and the House of Representatives 66-1.

The bill has no impact on the larger Land Grant Permanent Fund.

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On that same day, March 6, a crime package was presented for the governor's signature. The comprehensive package of public safety legislation does the following:

Provides funding for and requires training of school resource officers. Training will include instruction in de-escalation techniques, adolescent development, and adolescent mental health disorders and treatment.

Increases distributions from the Law Enforcement Protection Fund for training and equipment for municipal police, county sheriff departments, university police and tribal police officers.

Allocates up to \$2 million to the Department of Public Safety to offset expenses for special deployments of state police officers in counties and municipalities around the state.

Creates funding for law enforcement agencies to recruit, pay bonuses to and train officers in community-oriented policing, a proven tool in combating crime.

Increases the penalty for being a felon in possession of firearm from a fourth-degree felony to a third-degree felony, boosting maximum prison time from 18 months to three years.

Increases the penalty for brandishing a firearm in commission of a felony from one year to three years for a first offense, five years for a repeat offense.

It also allows judges to impose longer prison sentences for violent criminals.

"I am dedicated to creating and maintaining safer communities for all New Mexicans," Rep. Dayan Hochman-Vigil, D-Bernalillo, a sponsor of the legislation said. "This legislation is one component of a robust plan of action addressing the state's crime crisis by holding criminals accountable, supporting our law enforcement with the tools and resources they need, and

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tackling the root causes of crime. I am proud to have been a part of the team championing this legislation, and I thank the governor for her leadership in shepherding this important bill through to law.”

Lujan Grisham also signed three child welfare bills March 6.

Senate Bill 130, sponsored by Sen. Linda Lopez, D-Bernalillo, makes it easier for students who have had to change schools because of a change in foster care placement, homelessness, or other reasons outside of the youth’s control to still get partial credit for work completed before the transfer;

Senate Bill 146, sponsored by Lopez and Rep. Susan Herrera, D-Rio Arriba, Santa Fe and Taos, allows the state to give more support to extended family and kinship caregivers;

Senate Bill 168, sponsored by Sens. Michael Padilla, D-Bernalillo, and Candace Gould, R-Bernalillo and Sandoval, makes technical fixes to New Mexico’s Extended Foster Care Act, which provides vital support up to age 21 for young people who have been in out-of-home placements.

The changes ensure the availability of federal funding for these young people and give the state additional flexibility in administering the best program possible.

Young people who are exiting care, need age-appropriate supports and opportunities to succeed in the transition to adulthood. Extended care provides these young people more time to finish school, learn increased responsibility, develop skills to be successful adults and build supportive networks and social capital.

March 6 was also the day the governor signed a bill into law that adds pregnancy and childbirth as a class protected from workplace discrimination.

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The bill allows women to ask employers for “reasonable accommodations” while pregnant or newly parenting. Accommodations could include a stool to sit on, more restroom breaks or time to express milk.

“Too many pregnant women are denied reasonable workplace accommodations like a place to sit or more water breaks or a limit on the weight they must lift. They are forced to choose between a safe, healthy pregnancy or the paycheck they need to support their family. In New Mexico, that ends today,” Lujan Grisham said.

The measure also prohibits an employer from forcing an employee to take paid or unpaid leave because of pregnancy, childbirth or a condition related to pregnancy or childbirth, if another reasonable accommodation can be provided.

“There is no world I can imagine in which it would be right or fair to discriminate against a woman for becoming a mother,” the governor said.

Rep.Gail Chasey, D-Bernalillo, and Sen.Liz Stefanics, D-Bernalillo, Lincoln, San Miguel, Santa Fe, Torrance and Valencia sponsored House Bill 25.

If an employer does not comply, the pregnant worker could file a complaint with the New Mexico Human Rights Commission.

The other protected classes named in the Human Rights Act are race, age, religion, color, national origin, ancestry, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and physical or mental handicap.

New Mexico joins 27 other states, the District of Columbia and four cities that have passed laws requiring some employers to provide reasonable accommodations to pregnant workers.

The federal Pregnancy Discrimination Act also forbids discrimination based on pregnancy in any

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aspect of employment, but the federal law applies only to employers with 15 or more workers; New Mexico's law applies to those with four or more employees.

The measure passed unanimously in both the state House and Senate.

A measure extending the tax holiday was signed into law March 5. It extends Small Business Saturday for five years.

House Bill 170 was sponsored by Rep. Doreen Gallegos, D-Doña Ana, and Sen. Steven Neville, R-San Juan.

In 2020, Small Business Saturday will be on Nov. 28. Fifteen categories of merchandise qualify for the tax-free status, including toys, games, electronics and sporting goods, as long as individual items cost less than \$500.

Studies compiled by the American Independent Business Alliance show that on average, 48 cents of each dollar spent locally stays in a community versus 14 cents spent at a chain store.

"Small Business Saturday has become a new tradition for many families during the holiday season," Lujan Grisham said. "It's a great way to support home-grown New Mexico businesses and save money on holiday gifts."