

Six pieces of legislation make progress

Written by gallupsun
Monday, 05 February 2024 11:12

With less than two weeks to go in the legislative session, bills are moving at a quickened pace, passing from one chamber to another and between committees.

Below are six pieces of legislation that made forward progress on Feb. 1 and 2 in Santa Fe:

FEB. 1

The full Senate passed Senate Bill 137 by a vote of 30-9. SB 137 now heads to the House of Representatives. AFT NM supports SB 137.

SB 137 (SCHOOL BOARD TRAINING)

SB 137 would implement several accountability measures for New Mexico's school boards and charter school councils. Among the provisions of the legislation are a 10-hour series of mandatory trainings for board/council members and the requirement for all board/council meetings to be webcast and archived for 3 years.

Additionally, SB 137 would require greater financial transparency for elected board candidates by changing the law to require campaign finance reporting for candidates spending more than \$1,000. Currently, only school districts serving more than 12,000 students are required to have their board candidates report campaign funding sources.

SB 137 would also prohibit newly elected board of education members from firing a current superintendent within the first 60 days after being sworn in. Presented as a cooling-off period, this provision seeks to keep stability when the controlling majority of board members could potentially change every two years.

HB 171 (SCHOOL GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS)

House Bill 171 is a reintroduced version of legislation from last session that, despite passing the legislature, was vetoed by Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham. HB 171 aims to modernize and update New Mexico's graduation requirements and create opportunities for local school districts to offer courses which reflect the needs of their students and the interests of their community.

HB 171 would keep a requirement for a minimum of 24 credits to graduate, remove the Algebra II requirement for graduation (while still requiring that Algebra II be offered), increase flexibility for electives which could be used for Career Technical Education or foreign language arts, and create more opportunities for offering financial literacy, without mandating it as required class.

The House of Representatives passed HB171 by a vote of 57-1. HB 171 now heads to the State Senate. AFT NM supports HB 171.

HB 123 (PROHIBIT LIBRARY BOOK BANNING)

House Bill 123 proposes to withhold state funding from libraries unless they adopt and comply with the American Library Association's Library Bill of Rights and adopt a written policy prohibiting the practice of banning books or other library materials on the basis of author's race, nationality, gender identity, sexual orientation, or political or religious views. (From the Legislative Education Study Committee's analysis.)

HB 123 is sponsored by Reps. Kathleen Cates, Natalie Figueroa, and Cristina Parajón. It is also sponsored by Sens. Harold Pope, Jr., and Antoinette Sedillo Lopez.

HB 123 passed the House Consumer and Public Affairs Committee on a vote of 4-2. AFT NM supports HB 123.

FEB. 2

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Senate Rules Committee

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 2 (BOARD OF REGENTS NOMINATING COMMITTEES)

This legislation would require nominees for regents at any of New Mexico's public higher education institutions to be vetted by a nominating committee prior to being submitted to the governor for final selection from among the pool of applicants vetted by the committee. This process is like the process that judicial nominees follow when appointed to judicial vacancies.

AFT New Mexico supports SJR 2 because we want to have the best qualified regents for New Mexico's higher education institutions, and we also want to reduce the potential for regent positions to be treated as political giveaways for political allies/donors. If passed by the Legislature, SJR 2 would go to New Mexico voters for approval.

SJR 2 passed with bi-partisan support on Feb. 2 in the Senate Rules Committee, with only Sens. Lopez and Ortiz y Pino dissenting.

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 5 (PUBLIC EMPLOYEES RETIREE HEALTH CARE FUND)

SJR 5 would ask New Mexico voters through a constitutional amendment to permanently protect the Retiree Healthcare Authority, in a way that is like the Educational Retirement Board and the Public Employee Retirement Authority.

AFT New Mexico supports SJR 5 because we believe that access to Retiree Healthcare is a promise that the State has made to nearly 100,000 public employees, 67% of which are educators. Educators contribute into this fund throughout their career, and we expect that promise to be available to all educators upon their retirement. If passed by the Legislature, SJR 5 would go to New Mexico voters for approval.

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SJR 5 passed on Feb. 2 in the Senate Rules Committee, with Sens. Moores, Nibert, Stefanics and Ortiz y Pino dissenting.

House Education Committee

HOUSE MEMORIAL 29

HM 29 would request the LESC to study public teacher compensation and career advancement opportunities, including salary differential pay based on teacher credentials or staffing needs; costs of living and housing availability statewide; and career advancement opportunities that do not require teachers to leave the classroom and that better support the needs of teachers and students. (From the Legislative Education Study Committee analysis.)

AFT New Mexico supports HM 29, and the legislation passed the House Education Committee with unanimous support on Feb. 2.

