

## Higher healthcare coverage, supplemental wage increase

Written by gallupsun  
Wednesday, 08 March 2023 21:16

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Dear Editor,

With just over a week to go in the 2023 Legislative Session, legislation continues to move forward, with three bills making progress today, HB 533, SB 521, and HB 245.

Things continue to move quickly, and soon floor debates will stretch well into the morning hours. As we head towards adjournment March 18, we continue to advocate for our members, profession, and communities every day in the Roundhouse.

### ***MARCH 8***

#### **Senate Finance 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 to healthcare costs.

AFT New Mexico supports this legislation and will continue to lobby for wage increases for the educators we represent in this and future sessions. SB 521 is a hard-won acknowledgement for our public employees and is a win for educators this late in the session. SB 521 passed the Senate Finance Committee on a party-line vote of 7-4.

#### **Senate Education Committee**

**House Bill 533**, carried by Rep. Ray Lara and Natalie Figueroa, would codify the levels of insurance coverage for educators which are currently provided for in House Bill 2, the FY '24 budget. As a reminder, the chart

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below outlines the new coverage levels:

Current Statute			Proposed in HB 2		
<15K/year	75% employer	25% employee	<\$50K/year	80% employer	20% employee
\$15-\$20K/year	70% employer	30% employee	\$50-\$60K/year	70% employer	30% employee
\$20-\$25K/year	65% employer	35% employee	\$60K+/year	60% employer	40% employee
\$25K+/year	60% employer	40% employee	<i>*Proposed changes will NOT override currently negotiated CBAs which provide higher coverage amounts.</i>		

House Bill 533 also achieves another long-standing goal of AFT New Mexico – as it is currently written, it removes the insurance coverage cap that a district can provide its employees. Specifically, current law says a district “may cover up to eighty percent” however, HB 533 changes that maximum amount to “a hundred percent.” This means that if a district is already providing the maximum amount under statute of 80%, it could now provide more coverage if that is a decision that a local district wants to pursue or negotiate.

AFT New Mexico stood in strong support for HB 533 and supports the removal of the statutory coverage cap. HB 533 passed the Senate Education Committee unanimously, and now heads to the Senate Finance Committee.

## House Judiciary Committee

**House Bill 245/a**, carried by Reps. Chavez, Anyanonu, Gurrola, Roybal Caballero, and Senator Ivey-Soto

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/a, and it previously passed the House Labor, Veterans, and Military Affairs Committee. Members of the House Judiciary Committee advanced HB 245/a on a party-line vote of 6-4.

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***Sincerely,***

***Whitney Holland***