Dear Editor,

We are now in the sixth week of the Legislative session and bills are beginning to make their way out of the N.M. House or N.M. Senate to the other legislative chamber. What does this look like in real life?

Generally, a bill will receive 1-3 committee hearings in the legislative chamber where the bill is introduced.

Once a bill passes those committees, it will be heard by the full chamber where it was introduced. If that chamber's majority votes "yes" on the legislation, it will then be sent to the other legislative chamber for consideration in committees and then by the full chamber before heading to the governor for her signature or veto.

House Bill 126 passed the full N.M. House of Representatives Jan. 22 by a vote of 64-3, and to illustrate how a bill makes its way through the Legislature, let's review this bill's journey to this point:

- Jan. 19 – HB 126 was introduced and referred to the House Economic and Development Committee.

- Feb. 2 – HB 126 was heard by the House Economic and Development Committee and cleared that committee on an 8-2 vote.

- Feb. 9 – HB 126 was heard by the House Education Committee and cleared that committee on an 11-0 vote.

- Feb. 22 – HB 126 was heard by the full House of Representatives and was approved on a 64-3 vote.

- Feb. 23 – HB 126 will be introduced in the State Senate and receive its committee

assignments (TBD) and repeat the above process before being sent to the Governor for her signature or veto.

The legislative process, by design, is slow and there are many steps along the way to gather input and review to make the strongest laws possible. It is a tedious process, but it helps to have many viewpoints considered before enacting a new law.

FEB. 22 - House of Representatives

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.

One amendment to HB 126/a was adopted during the Feb. 22 floor debate and it addressed some concerns of representatives who wanted to ensure that foreign languages, Algebra II, and other courses like financial literacy were specifically mentioned as courses that could be offered by New Mexico districts.

AFT New Mexico President Whitney Holland spoke in favor of HB 126/a throughout HB 126/a's progress in the House of Representatives. We believe that with 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. HB 126/a now heads to the State Senate.

House Appropriations and Finance Committee

Like House Bill 126, **House Bill 2**, the budget for Fiscal Year 2024 is now in the State Senate. This means pieces of legislation, no matter how worthy the cause, will have difficulty finding funding as most resources are committed to programs outlined in the current version of House Bill 2. This does not mean that the budget is set in stone, however, it does represent an obstacle for bills to advance.

At this stage of the legislative session, one of the main functions of the House Appropriations and Finance Committee
is to ensure that legislation with a fiscal impact is screened thoroughly to determine if the necessary funds are in the budget. If they are, the committee will pass the bill –
as they did recently with House Bill 127, the EA minimum salary bill
– but if the money to enact the legislation is not in the budget, the committee will temporarily table the legislation.

If money is found to enact the tabled legislation through in Senate Finance Committee, the legislation will be removed from the table and advanced.

It is important to know that many bills which are being tabled, including the two below, are not being tabled because of the policy they are seeking to establish, but a lack of available funding in the budget. Even though bills are tabled, the House Appropriations and Finance Committee members are still hearing these presentations and developing a list of items to begin to evaluate for the following fiscal year.

House Bill 39/a, carried by Rep. Liz Thomson, seeks to align dual-licensed instructional support provides to the existing 3-Tier system of funding currently applied to Level I, II, or III teachers and Level III Counselors.

HB 39/a was tabled on Feb. 22. We thank Rep. Thomson for her steadfast advocacy on behalf of our dual-licensed educators.

House Bill 82/a, the Student Borrowers Bill of Rights, received its first committee hearing this morning. Sponsored by Reps. Christine Chandler and Patricia Roybal Caballero, this legislation seeks to regulate and license student debt servicers doing business in New Mexico

HB 82/a was tabled on Feb. 21. We thank Reps. Chandler and Roybal Caballero for their advocacy on behalf of student borrowers in New Mexico.

Sincerely,

Whitney Holland

President, NM American Federation of Teachers

