

Dear Editor,

Welcome to week seven of nine of the 2023 Legislative Session. As we mentioned last week, many bills are “making the jump” from one chamber to another – such as HB 151, which cleared the NM House of Representatives Feb. 24. (

HB 151

would extend unemployment benefits to non-tenure track faculty when class schedules are abruptly changed.)

We are still advocating around our AFT New Mexico-supported bills, and we are pleased to report two of those bills (HB 126/a and HB 181) advanced, while another HB 150 was tabled in the House Appropriations and Finance Committee.

While we want to see all our supported bills be enacted into law, there are always some worthy bills that do not make the cut for funding. In the case of HB 150, the delay in action Feb. 27 only raises the stakes of inaction by the Legislature when it comes to funding Retiree Healthcare.

***FEB. 27***

### ***Senate Education Committee***

**House Bill 181**, carried by Reps. Joanne Ferrary, Debbie Sariñana, Christine Trujillo, and Sen. Bill Soules

, was advanced by a vote of 66-2 last 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.

## High school graduation changes

Written by gallupsun

Monday, 27 February 2023 23:15

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HB 181 received unanimous support Feb. 27 from members of the Senate Education Committee. HB 181 now heads to the Senate Finance Committee.

**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.

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 received unanimous support in the Senate Education Committee Feb. 27.

## House Appropriations and Finance Committee

**HB 150**, carried by Rep. Natalie Figueroa, will increase the contributions to the NM Retiree Healthcare Authority by 0.5%, with a split between employees and employers of 0.17% and 0.33%, respectively. This legislation is critical for our AFT NM Retiree constituency, and if enacted, HB 150 would help to better fund the Authority's obligations to New Mexico retirees.

AFT NM's member of the RHCA Board of Directors, Therese Saunders, spoke in support of HB 150 Feb. 27 during the HAFC presentation on the bill, however, lacking the \$18M in needed employer funding for the increase, the legislation was unfortunately tabled. Without Legislative action, the NM Retiree Healthcare Authority will begin deficit spending in eight years. Figueroa made a strong case for legislative action and members of the House Appropriations and Finance Committee pledged to work with her to identify funding during the interim budgetary process.

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### **MARCH 1**

#### **Senate Education Committee**

**HB 151**, carried by Reps. Christine Trujillo and Patricia Roybal Caballero. 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 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 Representatives on a vote of 40-25 during the week of Feb. 20.

**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, Lu is 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.

Even though the funds for HB 127 are in the current version of the budget, advancing HB 127 is necessary so these newly won minimums are permanently in statute. We will be on-hand to support this legislation March 1.

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Sincerely,

Whitney Holland

President, NM American Federation of Teachers

