

Adjunct unemployment legislation advances

Written by gallupsun
Saturday, 04 March 2023 14:40

Dear Editor,

We have two weeks to go, and AFT NM-supported legislation continues to move forward in the Legislature.

This update contains legislative action on two bills, plus another three bills which are slated for tomorrow and Monday.

Finally, we have added an additional category of bills we have been watching this session which are on their final step in this legislative process. Specifically, legislation that is on its final hearing by either the House of Representatives or State Senate before being sent to Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham for her signature or veto. (We will add one more category soon that will list bills that have fully cleared the Legislature and are on the Governor's desk.)

MARCH 3

Senate Education Committee

House Bill 151/a, carried by Reps. Trujillo and Roybal Caballero, and Sen. Sedillo Lopez 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. HB 151/a does not create new access to unemployment benefits, but rather helps to clarify existing definitional language.

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/a had a few clarifying amendments added in committee March 3 and received unanimous support from members of the Senate Education Committee.

House Judiciary Committee

House Bill 236, led by Rep. Eleanor Chavez and co-sponsored by Reps. Borrego, Castellano, Gurrola, Roybal Caballero, Rubio, and Sen. McKenna, would initiate a process for New Mexico to establish safe staffing parameters in our hospitals.

HB 236 is important as it would boost patient care levels by lessening the case loads of nurses and other healthcare professionals, and it would also help to lessen the burnout experienced by our healthcare workers.

AFT New Mexico is partnering with NUHHCE District 1199 to promote and advocate for this legislation. HB 236 was previously endorsed by the House Health Committee, and March 3, House Judiciary Committee members heard the bill's presentation and public comment. Many healthcare professionals and the NM Nurses Association rose in support of HB 236, while several large hospital chains (including UNM) and the NM Hospital Association opposed the bill. Committee debate on HB 236 will continue into March 4.

AFT NM-supported Legislation on Final Third Reading:

- **House Bill 126/a** – HS Graduation Redesign
- **House Bill 181** – National Board Certification Units

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House Bill 245, carried by Reps. Chavez, Anyanonu, Gurrola, and Roybal Caballero, 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, and it previously passed the House Labor, Veterans, and Military Affairs Committee.

MARCH 6

House Bill 403, carried by Rep. Joy Garratt and Sen. Leo Jaramillo, seeks to institute a multiplier factor to higher education institutions to help adjunct and contingent faculty earn Public Service Loan Forgiveness on a quicker timetable. The act requires higher education institutions to calculate an instructor's full-time status by multiplying the number of credit hours or student contact hours by a minimum of 4.35 so that an instructor teaching one three-credit hour course would be credited with 13.05 hours of work for the purpose of calculating eligibility for the public service loan forgiveness program.

AFT NM supports HB 403 and has partnered with the Student Borrowers Protection Center on this legislation, and it has previously passed the House Education Committee.

House Bill 417, carried by Reps. Trujillo, Roybal Caballero, Gurrola, and Chavez, would establish a minimum salary for adjunct faculty in New Mexico at \$52,000 for full-time workload. (Less than full-time would be pro-rated under the legislation.) This legislation is an acknowledgement and recognition of the work provided by adjunct faculty in our institutions of higher education as these institutions rely on non-tenured instructors more every year.

AFT NM supports HB 417, and United Academics of UNM President Ernesto Longa will serve as expert witness during this bill's hearing.

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Sincerely,

Whitney Holland

