



# AFT-West Virginia 2017 Legislative Update

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Post

Thursday, February 16, 2017



The 2017 WV Legislative Session is under way, and AFT-WV is encouraged by Governor Justice's focus on education issues. Despite the challenging budget situation for our state, AFT-WV is optimistic about the Governor's commitment to public education and his understanding of many issues currently facing our schools.

## State of the State Reaction

AFT-West Virginia President Christine Campbell weighed in on Governor Justice's speech, which tackled issues the union has been discussing for several years:

### **Pay Raise**

*"It's a sign of Governor Justice's commitment to education to consider salaries during tough economic times. Attracting and retaining high quality educators is the core of providing the best education for our students, and clearly the governor understands that we must address our lagging salaries to achieve this goal; however, we can't stop with teachers. Service personnel and public employees provide vital services to all citizens in this state, and AFT-West Virginia will work throughout the session to include these employees in the pay raise proposal."*

### **Eliminating Education Bureaucracy**

*"I'm thrilled at Governor Justice's proposal to streamline bureaucracy in the education system. AFT-West Virginia has been discussing the fact that education is "top heavy" for many years. We need to use our resources at the classroom level, where they are most beneficial to our students. When money is tight, we need to make sure we get the most bang from every buck for our children. Our taxpayers and our kids deserve it."*

### **A-F School Rating System**

*"We support the Governor's call to eliminate excessive testing and the punitive A-F rating system. It's time we let our teachers focus on teaching and learning, not standardized testing."*

## Another Vacancy on WV Board of Education

On February 13, Beverly Kingery resigned from the West Virginia Board of Education in a letter to Gov. Jim Justice. Kingery did not specify the reasons for leaving. Since his inauguration Jan. 16, Governor Justice has appointed four new voting members to the school board. All four of the newly-appointed members are former educators. With Kingery's departure and another vacant seat, Justice will have appointed six voting members to the body after filling the slots.

## House and Senate Labor Caucus

As the only education organization that is a member of the AFL-CIO, AFT-WV participates in standing weekly meetings with a captive audience of legislators to discuss the union's position on bills and answer questions.

*AFT-WV will be evaluating and developing positions on education bills, and will publish our positions in future legislative updates. If you have comments directed at specific bills, please email them to [info@aftwv.org](mailto:info@aftwv.org).*

## Bill Count

As of February 15<sup>th</sup>, 86 bills related to education or public employees have been introduced. As specific bills begin to advance, we will begin listing summaries and the statuses of these bills.



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**Committee Action of Note (as of 2-15-17)**

**House and Senate Education Committees**

Both House and Senate Education began meeting last week, with the action being largely organizational, including introducing the committee membership and staff, adopting rules, and other housekeeping items. The House Education Committee appointed a subcommittee on K-12 education and the Senate Education Committee appointed a subcommittee on school choice, both of which we will closely monitor as they begin to meet.

This week both committees heard presentations from the West Virginia Department of Education about the organization and budget.

As of 2-15-17, the following bill is the only education legislation to pass out of committee:

**HB 2123** - Making the West Virginia Schools for the Deaf and Blind eligible to participate in any and all funding administered or distributed by the West Virginia School Building Authority

**Retirement and Pensions**

Jeff Fleck, Executive Director of CPRB, presented at the House (Tue) and Senate (Wed) Pension Committee meetings on the current status of WV public pensions.

These meetings followed a Joint Finance Committee hearing on Monday featuring a presentation by The PEW Foundation on WV's pension success story.

"We have to point to West Virginia as sort of the poster child, frankly, of states that have made the most dramatic turnarounds," Katie Selenski, Pew's state policy director, told a joint meeting of West Virginia House and Senate Finance and Pensions committees on Monday.

"You committed to a plan in the '90s and have really stuck to it," she said.

House Finance Chairman Eric Nelson, R-Kanawha, who has floated the idea of refinancing the pension liabilities to lower annual payments, raised that option with the Pew researchers Monday.

"You can reduce contributions in the short-term. However, this is a matter of when you pay, not if you pay," Pew senior officer David Draine responded, adding, "It's the sticking with the plan that has gotten West Virginia to the progress it has made."

Read the full WV Gazette article at <http://www.wvgazette.com/news-politics/20170213/pew-trust-wv-tremendous-turnaround-story-for-pensions#sthash.i08308RL.dpuf>.

AFT-WV believes the state should stay the course with the current fiscally responsible pension liability payment plan, and will be watching both chambers to see if any legislation on this issue develops.

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