

# AFT-WV LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

FIGHTING FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION



FROM STATEHOUSE TO SCHOOLHOUSE

JANUARY 19, 2024

## 2024 Session Begins with Senate off to a Quick Start

The 2024 Legislative Session kicked off last week with Governor Jim Justice delivering the State of the State address on Wednesday evening. AFT-West Virginia President Fred Albert weighed in on the Governor's proposals, explaining while he was appreciative of the proposed 5% salary increase, he doesn't believe the increase is enough to move the needle on the school staffing crisis our school systems are currently experiencing. Albert also reiterated the need for a dedicated funding source for PEIA, so pay increases aren't eaten into by increased health care costs.

"At a time, when we have unprecedented educator shortages in our state and an equally massive budget surplus, it's disappointing that Governor Justice didn't mention the teacher shortage and propose more funding and initiatives to sufficiently attract and retain certified teachers and other critical school staff. The 5% increases given over the last few years have not even put a dent in the hemorrhaging of teachers and school service personnel from West Virginia." Watch or listen to Albert discuss these issues on [Talkline with Hopsy Kercheval](#) (Jan. 11th episode, 17:30 minute mark) and [Outside the Echo Chamber](#) (19:19 minute mark).

## Pay Raise Bills

Governor Justice proposed a 5% across the board pay increase for all public employees, teachers and service personnel in his state of the state address, and has included that in his budget bill submitted to the legislature for their consideration.

Other pay raise bills of interest include:

[HB 4202](#) is pay raise bill for school service personnel that calls for an increase of \$670 per month. The bill advanced from the House Education committee and moves to the House Finance committee for consideration.

[HB 4767](#) is a pay bill for professional educators that calls for a \$5000 increase. The bill advanced from the House Education committee and moves to the House Finance committee for consideration.

## Student Behavior and Discipline

Student discipline is a top priority for AFT-WV, and we have been encouraged by the interest in the topic by several legislative leaders. Senate Education Chairperson Amy Grady has been very vocal about her desire to address this issue and AFT-WV President Fred Albert has a meeting scheduled with her next week to discuss potential legislation.

## Bills Passed From One Chamber

[SB 143](#) creates the WV Guardian Program, which allows a county board of education to contract with an independent contractor who is an honorably discharged veteran, former state trooper, former deputy sheriff, or former federal law-enforcement officer as security on school grounds. The bill passed the Senate and moves to the House for consideration.

[SB 146](#) creates an adult education task force to consider funding for adult education learning centers. The bill passed



the Senate and moves to the House for consideration.

[SB 159](#) prohibits persons convicted of certain crimes against minors from holding positions on boards of education passed. The bill passed the Senate and moves to the House for consideration.

[SB 162](#) establishes the Summer Feeding for All Program, which allows schools to assist with the feeding of our students during the summer break. The bill passed the Senate and moves to the House for consideration.

[SB 172](#) revises requirements of local school improvement councils. This will define the make-up of the parents on the improvement council and require the minutes of the meetings. The bill passed the Senate and moves to the House for consideration.

## Bills Advanced From Committee

[SB 152](#) requires the displaying of the official US motto in public schools, pending certain criteria are met. The bill is on second reading in the Senate.

[SB 253](#) establishes minimum student enrollment for the school aid formula. This bill would affect only three counties: Calhoun, Gilmer, and Wirt. These counties currently have a net enrollment of under 1200 students and this bill would ease the financial hardship posed by small student enrollment and assist the counties in providing adequate student services. (This bill died last session.) The bill advanced from the Senate Education committee and moves to the Senate Finance committee for consideration.

[Comm. Sub for SB 280](#) allows teachers in public schools to discuss certain theories. The bill was amended by the Senate Education committee to include “No public school board, school superintendent, or school principal shall prohibit a public school classroom teacher from discussing or answering questions from students about scientific theories of how the universe and/or life came to exist.” It is important to note the bill is permissive, not a mandate. The bill advanced from Senate Education and is on second reading on the Senate floor.

[HB 4769](#) clarifies the appropriate and inappropriate duties for school counselors while also providing the definition of a school counselor. The bill aims to allow counselors to focus more on student-centered duties and less on administrative tasks. The bill advanced from the House Education committee and moves to the House floor for consideration.

[SB 448](#) requires age-appropriate instruction on Holocaust in public schools. The bill now moves to the Senate floor for consideration.

[SB 259](#) requires the Higher Education Policy Commission to create and administer a PROMISE Plus Program for the purpose of supplementing the PROMISE Scholarship award of an individual who meets more rigorous standards so that the total of both scholarships received by that individual is equal to the actual cost of tuition. The bill advanced from the Senate Education committee and moves to the Senate Finance committee for consideration.



## Local AFT Officers: Legislative Update Zoom Meetings

AFT-WV will be continuing to conduct Legislative Updates via Zoom for our local officers. Local officers should be on the lookout early next week for another invite link to a Zoom meeting, likely to be held on Thursday.

## Stay Informed during the Legislative Session

**Take advantage of the many ways to stay informed from AFT-WV!**

- Visit the AFT-WV website at [www.aftwv.org](http://www.aftwv.org)
- While you are on the website, sign up for email alerts from AFT-WV. Please use a personal, non-work email address.
- “Like” us at [Facebook.com/AFTWV](https://www.facebook.com/AFTWV) and follow us on Twitter [@AFTWV](https://twitter.com/AFTWV)
- Many AFT local presidents and staff representatives use the Remind app to communicate with their local members. Ask your local president or staff rep if your county uses Remind and get signed up!
- If you are a local AFT officer, watch for invites for Legislative Update Zoom meetings and participate.