

# AFT-WV LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

FIGHTING FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION



FROM STATEHOUSE TO SCHOOLHOUSE

FEBRUARY 21, 2025

## 2025 Session Begins

The 2025 Legislative Session kicked off last week with newly-elected Governor Patrick Morrisey delivering the State of the State address Wednesday evening. "While I'm glad the Governor mentioned our union's top three priorities— PEIA, pay, and student discipline- the speech was short on details on how the Governor plans to address these items. PEIA is the top concern of our members, so we are anxious to see what bills the Governor plans to put forth to stabilize PEIA and ensure a high-quality affordable health insurance plan for education and public employees," said AFT-West Virginia President Kristie Skidmore.

Skidmore has been working to educate legislators and the public on the issues facing public education, appearing on MSNBC and many local media outlets as well. Watch her discuss the challenges facing education employees on HD Media's [Outside the Echo Chamber](#) (19:30 minute mark.)

## A Note About Procedural Changes this Year

On the House side, there is a significant change in how the committee process is functioning this year. There are three standing subcommittees (Public Education, School Choice, and Higher Education) that will meet each week, and the full Education Committee will meet twice a week. The process for considering bills will be slower and committees will discuss and deliberate on each bill in the following manner: full committee, subcommittee for amendment phase, then back to the full committee for a vote to advance or reject the bill. The process on the Senate side remains the same as previous years.

Additionally, the House has chosen to no longer hold public hearings on bills. The new process to offer comments on bills before the House is outlined in the graphic to the right.



## PEIA

We were pleased to hear the Governor, during his State of the State, list PEIA as an issue that absolutely must be addressed and state his goal is to create both short and long-term solutions. However, it's still the details of any solution that everyone needs to hear and none were offered during the speech. Our union is looking forward to hearing about the Governor's plan to make PEIA a high-quality healthcare plan that is affordable for teachers and service personnel. At press time, the Governor has not put forth any bills or specifics to address PEIA. As soon as he does, AFT-WV will share the bill and our take on the proposal.

There have been several other bills regarding PEIA introduced, and we expect there to be more in the coming weeks. The two bills below have been introduced and referred to committees. While it is unclear at this time if there is broad legislative support and if they will move forward, it is important that we keep them on our radar and voice our collective opposition to both bills early in the session. Privatization would mean higher costs for education and public employees.

[HB 2623](#) - Abolishing PEIA and establishing contract healthcare for State Employees

LEAD SPONSOR: Sheedy OTHER SPONSORS: Horst, Coop-Gonzalez, Foggin. Referred to House Health and Human Resources Committee

[SB 426](#) - Dissolving PEIA and converting to employer-owned mutual insurance company

LEAD SPONSOR: Taylor; Referred to Senate Banking and Insurance Committee

It is important to note that several legislators have expressed their opposition to bills to privatize or abolish PEIA after public outcry regarding these bills, so keep contacting your elected officials and ask them to stabilize and strengthen PEIA, not privatize it. Find



your delegates and senators at: [https://www.wvlegislature.gov/legisdocs/publications/info/DIRECTORY\\_2025.pdf](https://www.wvlegislature.gov/legisdocs/publications/info/DIRECTORY_2025.pdf)

## Pay Raise

Governor Morrisey mentioned the need for a pay raise in his State of the State address but without specifics. Additionally, there is no pay increase included in the budget he submitted to the Legislature. At press time, the Governor has not put forth his specific proposal for a pay increase, however it is important to note it is very early in the session and big ticket items like salaries and PEIA tend not to be addressed this early. A pay increase continues to be one of AFT-WV's top priorities. There are several other pay raise bills that have been introduced but not been considered by a committee yet, including:

[HB 2476](#) provides a 25% pay increase for teachers. The bill was introduced and referred to the House Education Committee.

[HB 2519](#) provides a \$900 monthly increase (25%) to state school service personnel. The bill was introduced and referred to the House Education Committee.

[SB 506](#) provides for market pay enhancement for teacher salaries in certain circumstances. This bill is essentially permitting locality pay. The bill was introduced and referred to the Senate Education Committee.

## 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 sponsored a bill last year that fell short of passage on the final day of the session. Additionally, the Governor mentioned student behavior in his State of the State, but his focus was directed at a cell phone ban in schools ([HB 2655](#).)

“While cell phones certainly can be a distraction, this is not what our union is continually hearing from our members as being the biggest problem. Teachers and service personnel are being hit, kicked and bitten every day by students, only to have many of these students return to their classroom the next day, if not sooner. For the safety of staff and all students, we need alternative placements, social-emotional supports, and other interventions for our schools. If we want to address classroom distractions and interruptions, our elected leaders need to get serious about passing legislation and fund the support to keep our school staff and other students safe from physical harm and stop the constant interruptions to learning,” explained Skidmore.

There are numerous bills introduced to address student discipline, however, none have been on a committee agenda for action at this stage in the session. A bill to reinstate corporal punishment has been introduced ([HB 2545](#)) but has not been on a committee agenda. AFT-WV opposes this bill.

## Bills Passed From One Chamber

[SB 460](#) creates exemptions to mandatory vaccination requirements to accommodate religious conviction or moral reasons. The bill also revises the existing medical exemption process, eliminates the position of the State Immunization Officer, and permits a civil action for violations of this section. The bill advanced from the Senate Health and Human Resources committee and advanced to the Senate floor. Multiple attempts were made to amend the bill on second reading but failed. There was additional discussion on third reading, but unfortunately the bill passed. AFT-WV would like to thank the senators who passionately fought for preserving strong vaccination standards to protect staff and students, most notably Dr. Takubo who offered his medical expertise during the floor discussion. (See roll call photo on the right.) The bill now moves to the House consideration. AFT-WV opposes this bill, as it will present risks to the health and safety of school employees and students. WV has consistently ranked as among the top in the country for vaccination rates, so this bill would be a step backward for our state.



## Bills Advanced From Committee

[SB 37](#) allows Teachers Retirement System members (after July 1, 2015) to exchange unused leave for monetary compensation. Employees would be able to sell up to 10 days accrued personal leave back to the county board for 80% of the pay rate. This is a bill that did not pass last year, but AFT-WV supported. The bill now advances to the Senate Finance Committee.

[SB 122](#) establishes minimum student enrollment for the school aid formula, and would help counties that have a net enrollment of under 1200 students. This bill will 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 now advances to the Senate Finance Committee.

[SB 275](#) removes requirement school cooks or custodians have high school diploma or equivalent, if they are over 21 years of age.

The bill is intended to help alleviate shortages in these classifications. The bill advanced from the Senate Education Committee and now moves to Senate Finance for consideration.

[SB 282](#) modifies provisions for employment of retired teachers as substitutes in areas of critical need and shortage. The bill advanced from the Senate Education Committee and is on 2nd reading in the Senate.

[SB 283](#) expands grade levels of personal finance course requirements needed for graduation. The bill advanced from the Senate Education Committee and is on 2nd reading in the Senate.

[SB 154](#) prohibits public schools from requiring students to participate in sexual orientation or gender identity instruction. This bill has been dubbed the “pronoun bill” and prohibits from teaching gender identity, giving false information to parents about a child transitioning and mandates reporting students if they come to teacher to talk about their gender identity. The bill allows parents to bring civil actions against the school. The bill advanced after lengthy discussion and was second referenced to the Senate Judiciary Committee.

[SB 158](#) modifies eligibility requirements for serving as member of State Board of Education to state Board members cannot become candidates or run for office or work in campaigns and political activities. The bill passed the Senate Education Committee and advanced to the Senate Judiciary Committee.

## **Bills of Interest (introduced, but no action taken yet)**

[SB 146](#) provides for substantial deference to state school superintendent's interpretations of school laws. As it is currently written, the bill states that county boards of education, county superintendents, employees of the county boards of education, and the West Virginia Public Employees' Grievance Board shall give substantial deference to the State Superintendent's interpretation of school law or rules of the State Board of Education. AFT-WV views the bill as an attack on the grievance process for school employees and their ability to resolve employee-employer disputes in an impartial venue and opposes this bill.

[SB 209](#) 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. This bill is a rollover bill that did not pass last year.

[HB 2187](#) permits teachers in K-12 schools be authorized to carry concealed firearms as a designated school protection officer. This bill is also rollover bill that did not pass last year.

[SB 547](#) creates the Charter Schools Startup Fund for the purpose of providing financial support to charter school applicants and charter schools that may not otherwise have the resources for start-up costs. AFT-WV opposes the further defunding of the public school system, particularly at a time when many of our local schools are in need of facility improvements.

[HB 2087](#) opens up access to online curriculum, and allows the general public to inspect additional instructional material adopted by the county board, including books in the classroom. The bill expands access beyond parent/guardians, which is existing law. AFT-WV believes this is problematic as it creates additional administrative burdens on educators' time and also opens the door to outside groups without children in the local schools to attack and disrupt school systems to advance a political agenda.

[HB 2635](#) makes classroom sizes equal so that aides can be best utilized and one-on-one time with teachers and students can be maximized without losing the use of an aide. This is a positive bill, and AFT-WV supports passage.

## **Local AFT Officers: Legislative Update Zoom Meetings**

AFT-WV will be continuing to conduct Legislative Updates via Zoom for our local officers this year. Local officers should be on the lookout for email and text invites each week.

## **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)
- “Like” us at [Facebook.com/AFTWV](https://www.facebook.com/AFTWV) . Also, follow your local chapter on social media, if applicable.
- 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.