

AFT-WV LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

FIGHTING FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION



FROM STATEHOUSE TO SCHOOLHOUSE

FEBRUARY 28, 2025

Public Employee Unions Hold Press Conference on PEIA

Public employee union leaders conducted a press conference on Wednesday to discuss the Legislature's responsibility to stabilize the West Virginia Public Employee Insurance Agency.

The press conference was held in conjunction with the West Virginia AFL-CIO's annual Legislative Conference, which many AFT-WV local leaders attended this week.

Union leaders called on the legislature to stabilize PEIA and also include stakeholders in finding a solution to the problem. Among the employee groups participating with AFT-WV and WVEA in the press conference were the United Mine Workers of America, Professional Fire Fighters of West Virginia, the WV Troopers Association, Communication Workers of America, and WV School Service Personnel Association. You can watch a recording of the press conference livestream on AFT-WV's facebook page.



PEIA

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, as mentioned in his State of the State address. 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. 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

[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

Student Behavior and Discipline Bill Advances

The big news this week is that Comm. Sub for [HB 2515](#), relating to elementary behavior intervention and safety, passed from the House Education Committee and advanced to the House floor. The bill is on third reading in the House. This bill is similar to one from last year that did not pass. It establishes clear discipline procedures, including a statewide discipline policy, provisions for removing violent students from the classroom and student support services to address the behaviors. The Committee Substitute version contains several amendments that improved the bill from its original version and gained bipartisan support.



Pay Raise

Governor Morrissey mentioned the need for a pay raise in his State of the State address but without specifics. 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.

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 the Senate. The bill then moved to the House for consideration, where it currently is in the "markup" phase of discussion by the Health and Human Resources committee. AFT-WV opposes this bill in its current form, as it will present risks to the health and safety of school employees and students. However, we are actively working with several House members to attempt to amend the bill with some vaccine requirements in hopes of preserving some guardrails on public health and safety.

[SB 92](#) is the Glucagon for Schools Act and allows schools to keep glucagon on site and sets up procedures to assist with diabetes management of students. The bill passed the Senate and moves to the House for consideration.

[SB 275](#) removes the requirement for school cooks or custodians to have a 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 passed the Senate and now moves to the House for consideration.

[SB 282](#) modifies provisions for employment of retired teachers as substitutes in areas of critical need and shortage. The bill passed the Senate and now moves to the House for consideration.

[SB 283](#) expands grade levels of personal finance course requirements needed for graduation. The bill passed the Senate and now moves to the House for consideration.

Bills Advanced From Committee

[SB 434](#) promulgates rules for implementing the use of wearable panic alarms by school employees for the purpose initiating campus-wide lockdowns and of notifying law enforcement during emergencies. The bill passed and advances to the House Finance Committee.

[SB 154](#) prohibits public schools from requiring students to participate in sexual orientation or gender identity instruction. This bill 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, where it advanced to the floor as a second committee substitute version. AFT-WV has concerns about the second committee substitute as it relates to employee discipline and local control. The bill is now on first reading in the Senate.

[Comm. Sub. for HB 2164](#) allows for public and private schools in West Virginia to employ security personnel. Guidelines and certification standards will be created by the Division of Protective Services for these positions. There is no fiscal note; the bill would be permissive, not a mandate, and up to the counties to fund. (This bill does not pertain to teacher carry.) The bill passed the House Education Committee and advances to the House Judiciary Committee for consideration.

[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 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.

[SB 284](#) relates to county board of education member orientation and compensation. The bill passed the Senate Education Committee and is on first reading on the Senate floor.

[SB 450](#) establishes the WV Guardian Program, which permits and creates rules for county boards to contract with former law enforcement officers to provide public safety and school security. The bill advanced from the Senate Education Committee and now moves to Senate Finance for consideration.

[SB 558](#) requires students take a computer science course prior to graduation. The bill advanced from Senate Education and moves to the Senate Finance Committee for consideration.

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.

[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. The bill is on the agenda for House Education for March 3. Educators are encouraged to contact members of the House Education Committee to express their opinion on this bill.

[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. It was referred to the House Education Committee.

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 and "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.