

WVEA

Standing Together for Public Schools

WEST VIRGINIA EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

AN NEA AFFILIATE

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

Update #1 – January 17, 2020

The first full week of the 2020 Legislative Session has come to a close! It has been a slow start for education-related bills, but some things have been moving.

SB 192 – WVSSAC Audit. This bill caused several delays this week in the Senate Education Committee. It was first brought up during Tuesday’s meeting and carried over to Thursday’s meeting. This bill would require the Legislative Auditor to do performance audits of the WV Secondary School Activities Commission. After hearing from a coach, the SSAC executive director and other interested parties the committee ultimately passed the bill out of committee. It should be on the Senate floor next week.

SB 297 – Home Ec Courses. This bill began to move Thursday evening. It would require the State Board of Education to create a home economics course that *may* be integrated into the curriculum of secondary schools. As the bill is currently written, it is up to the individual counties as to whether they offer the course as part of their curriculum. The committee substitute passed out of committee and was supposed to go to the Finance Committee. On Friday, however, when the bill was reported Senator Tarr asked that the bill bypass the Finance Committee and go to the Senate Floor. This motion passed and the bill will be on first reading next week.

SB 42 – Faith-based Programs. This bill moved quickly through the Senate Education committee and was on second reading/amendment stage on Friday in the Senate. This bill would allow drug awareness and prevention programs to include faith-based electives for drug awareness in classrooms. No amendments were made, and it will be on third reading/passage next week.

SB 291 – Health Parity. This bill is currently in the Senate Health and Human Resources Committee and it would require PEIA to treat behavioral/mental health and substance abuse treatment equally to medical and surgical treatment. PEIA Director Ted Cheatham spoke against this bill. He said that while PEIA is exempt from mental health parity, they do treat this issue mostly the same. He said copays are the same, however some diagnosis are not currently covered. In the end, the senators wanted to hear how the bill would affect other insurance companies as well, so they decided to lay over the bill.

SB 16 – Donor Lists (Right to Unite Act). This bill would prevent anyone from being able to obtain membership lists or donor information from a 501c3. This bill caught our eye because it could be used to hide who is behind the start-up of a charter school since they can be started by 501c3’s. The bill sailed through the Senate Judiciary committee and is on second reading/amendment stage on Friday. No amendments were made and it will be on third reading/passage next week.

Many Bills are Introduced...

Please keep in mind that hundreds of bills have been introduced and many more will be introduced this session. Most of the introduced bills will never see a committee agenda. Don’t panic because you see a particular bill or topic introduced. Our lobbyists monitor the bills, committee agendas and committee meetings each day throughout the session. If an education-related bill begins to move we will report it and make you aware.

For instance, a new education savings accounts bill was introduced on Thursday in the Senate (SB 515). We will be keeping an eye on it and let you know as soon as anything begins to happen.

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Manufacturing Inventory and Equipment Tax Reduction

One topic that you will be hearing about often during the session is the reduction in the manufacturing inventory and equipment tax. Although there is no bill introduced yet, it remains a top priority for the republicans in the legislature. Details are sketchy since we have not seen the language and a number of different versions have been discussed.

But each version of the bill does have one thing in common – the continued loss of business tax revenue and working West Virginian's picking up the difference.

Nearly all the money generated by the manufacturing inventory tax goes to county governments and public schools. This will mean the continued loss of money for our already struggling local governments and county school systems. That translates to less deputies on the road, less programs in our schools and less services provided by local governments.

This is also a continuation of the move to shift the tax burden from businesses to working-class West Virginian's under the guise of attracting business to our state. Since 2005, the state has reduced business taxes by nearly half a billion dollars (\$478 million) while increasing the taxes on citizens by \$331 in order to fill the gaps in the state budget. The promised jobs didn't materialize, and the state budget suffered. This tax reduction is more of the same by reducing the business tax by another \$100 million (estimated).

As soon as a bill dealing with the manufacturing inventory and equipment tax reduction is introduced, we will be sharing the details and talking more about this tax reduction.

Monday is Martin Luther King Jr. Day and many of you are making plans to come to the capitol and talk to legislators. It is important that they know that we are still watching what they do and that they know how you feel about the issues.

WVEA will have a table setup in the upper rotunda on the House side on Monday beginning around 9 AM. We will have talking points, maps and lists of House and Senate members/offices. We hope to see you there!

For those of you who are not coming to the Capitol soon to lobby, please contact your legislators and let them know how you feel on key issues and your thoughts on bills that are starting to move through committees. You can also find talking points and member lists on the WVEA website – www.wvea.org.