

Advisory Council of Classified Employees – Assembly Report

Members of the Advisory Council of Classified Employees (ACCE) were encouraged to reach out to the legislature in support of the proposed amendments to HB3279, which would involve the removal of non-voting members and the shortening of terms for faculty, staff, and students. These changes would impact approximately 30,000 workers across the state.

HB2623, which concerns the potential elimination of the West Virginia Public Employee Insurance Act (PEIA), is not expected to advance but should continue to be monitored. Should the bill pass, it would result in the removal of Sections 5-16 of the PEIA Act.

HB2527, a bill aimed at providing financial assistance to corrections officers to cover tuition costs, was also discussed. Additionally, another bill proposes the creation of a tuition reimbursement program specifically for corrections officers.

HB2610, which mandates schools to waive tuition and fees for disabled military personnel and dependents, provided they maintain a 2.5 GPA, was introduced. However, the bill does not address the funding concerns, which would place an unfunded mandate on schools.

HB2697, which seeks to prevent colleges from charging students for transcripts, was also brought up for discussion.

HB2737, which establishes a Higher Education Health and Aid Grant Program, was not discussed in detail. This program is intended to be grant-funded.

The Senate has introduced companion bills to several of the House proposals, including the Hunger-Free Campus Act and a measure exempting military veterans and their dependents from tuition fees.

HB2879, which creates the West Virginia Math & Science Teacher Scholarship Program, was discussed. This program offers up to \$2,000 in debt relief for certified math and science teachers who commit to teaching for a specified number of years. Additional details may be available from the meeting notes.

HB2958, which addresses trespassing on higher education property, was reviewed. Several committee members raised questions regarding the definition of trespassing. The bill's language was amended to specify that trespassing refers to "premises of an institution of higher education" rather than "student residential premises." The only guidance provided was a reference to COVID-related legislation, but it did not fully address the committee's concerns. Under this law, individuals convicted of trespassing could be barred from the institution.

We also discussed the **Public Area Liability Protection Act**, which differs from last year's Campus Self-Defense Act. This bill proposes that employees should be permitted to carry firearms anywhere on campus without restrictions. If passed, it would make it impossible to

designate certain areas of the campus as gun-free zones. The bill has been introduced to the House Judiciary Committee for consideration.

Next, we addressed the increasing issue of fraudulent applications on campuses. ACCE representatives inquired whether any schools had noticed patterns in these fraudulent applications. Institutions are increasingly receiving fake FAFSA applications, as well as counterfeit college and high school transcripts. One school reported utilizing the Element 451 program in collaboration with the DMV to help identify fraudulent applications and fake IDs via encrypted transmission. Although this process does not automatically reject the application, it provides an additional layer of verification to secure FAFSA funds or university admissions.

Furthermore, the West Virginia Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators may serve as a resource for sharing information on fraudulent data and preventing other schools from falling victim to similar schemes. Establishing a communication system among institutions to exchange information related to fraud could be beneficial. Continued dialogue at the college and university level is necessary, and the Higher Education Policy Commission (HEPC) may play a role in addressing these challenges.

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