



By Brian Hawkins, NEA-NH Government Relations Director

Legislative Update: HB607 Tabled!

2022 Legislative Session Begins! – HB 607 Tabled!

Our 2022 legislative session began this week with at least a temporary, but important win for protecting public education when the House tabled HB 607, the local school voucher bill, on a 187-170 vote. There were 23 Republicans who joined Democrats in voting to table this legislation that would have been a school budget and property tax disaster if adopted.

You can see our [Just the Facts on this bill here](#).

You can also find the roll call [here](#), so please reach out to the legislators Republican and Democrat who voted to stop this bill in its tracks and urge them to leave it on the table where it belongs because there is no way to fix or improve a bill like this, as opponents of public education will continue to try and push their colleagues to bring this up again.

From the outset we identified 3 priorities for the upcoming session:

1. **Defeat legislation that expands school privatization/school voucher program.** Support passage of legislation that repeals or holds accountable the current programs recently passed.
2. **Defeat legislation that would further expand or fortify the recently passed banned concepts law.** Support legislation that repeals and replaces this with language that supports an honest and accurate education in the classroom.
3. **Defeat legislation that would make our members' and their students less safe in schools.** Support bills that will help make our schools safer, and students and staff healthier.

The bills we try to highlight coming up for hearings or votes each week will focus on these 3 areas. **There are critical Bills on Vouchers, Banned Concepts and School Privatization Have Hearings Next Week!**

Privatization/School Vouchers

Cap Voucher Program Spending – HB 1684

This legislation would limit the amount of funds appropriated from the education trust fund for the state voucher program to the amounts that were budgeted for in the current 2-year state budget. As has been widely reported the current school voucher program is more than 5,000% over budget from what the NH Department of Education estimated it would cost. This was largely due to a low-balling of the cost to help get it passed into law. Most of this spending are on students who were not in the public school system last year. HB 1684 simply seeks to hold the Department of Education and the Legislature to its budgets for this law that not only siphons money away from our public schools, but also funds a second school system through these vouchers on private, religious, home school and other expenses not approved by taxpayers. Right now, the program is a blank check on the state's education trust fund, and this would protect taxpayers from a runaway train in unknown voucher spending.

REQUEST: Please sign, write, or testify in **SUPPORT of this**

legislation: <http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/house/committees/remotetestimony/default.aspx>

Public Hearing: 1/12/2022 at 2:15 p.m. Location: Legislative Office Building Time: 2:15 p.m.

Expanding Education Tax Credit Vouchers – HB 1298

This bill would expand the income eligibility for the education tax credit voucher program. Currently, the income eligibility is less than or equal to 300% of the Federal Poverty Level. This legislation would raise that to 500%, or \$132,500 for a family of 4 to qualify. Like other voucher programs across the country this continues a slippery slope of expanding such a program. The tax credit is against state business and interest and dividends tax owed, should a business or individual donate to the program. Like the new "Education Freedom Account" Program, the Education Tax Credit program funds are given to families to pay for private education expenses through a private third-party organization, and also with nearly zero accountability on finances and quality.

REQUEST: Please sign, write or testify in **OPPOSITION to this**

legislation: <http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/house/committees/remotetestimony/default.aspx>

Public Hearing: 1/13/2022 at 1:00 p.m. Location: Legislative Office Building Time: 1:00 p.m.

Banned Concepts

Repeal and Replace Banned Concepts Law — SB 304

SB 304 would do 2 important things:

1. Repeal the banned concepts law passed through the state budget process that has chilled critical discourse in classrooms through its vagueness and high stakes consequences for educators. This law has led NEA-NH and others to file a lawsuit in federal court against this law, but the legislature should act now by repealing it and replacing it with language that encourages important conversations in classrooms that will help prepare our students to succeed in the future.
2. Replaces the current law with language that protects educators from liabilities for “engaging in any form of instruction concerning the historical or current experiences of any group that is protected from discrimination.”

Rather than being worried about fringe groups putting monetary bounties on our educators’ credentials, we should be supporting our educators in fostering the classroom discussions that help prepare students for the future. We can do that by helping them learn the mistakes of the past, so they are not repeated in the future. That is what this legislation is about. Please consider testifying about how the current law has affect your classroom or school or the education of your students.

REQUEST – Please sign, write, or testify in **SUPPORT of this legislation:** <http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/remotecommittee/senate.aspx>

Hearing: 1/12/2022 at 1:45 p.m. Location: State House Time: 1:45 p.m.

HB 1313 Public Higher Education Teaching and Employee Training to Higher Education –

HB 1313 would take the current banned concepts law that applies to K-12 schools and attempt to apply it to public post-secondary instruction and institutions. This bill makes little sense when the current law is under 2 federal lawsuits and runs counter to the important tenants of academic freedom that have been encouraged, accepted and affirmed on our college campuses.

REQUEST: Please sign, write or testify in **OPPOSITION to this legislation:** <http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/house/committees/remotetestimony/default.aspx>

Public Hearing: 1/11/2022 at 2:00 p.m. Location: Legislative Office Building Time: 2:00 p.m.

Health and Safety of Students and Staff

Improving School Nutritional Standards – HB 1561

This bill would raise nutrition standards for school meal programs on fruits, vegetables, whole grains, sodium, and added sugars. This bi-partisan legislation is a step toward improving the health of our students and their ability to learn and grow.

REQUEST: Please sign, write or testify in FAVOR of this

legislation: <http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/house/committees/remotetestimony/default.aspx>

Public Hearing: 1/12/2022 at 1:00 p.m. Location: Legislative Office Building Time: 1:00 p.m.

Retirement

Cost of Living Adjustments for retirees in the state retirement system – HB 1535

This legislation would establish an initial cost of living adjustment for state retirees in 2022 of 1.5% who have been retired for at least 60 months. It would then setup subsequent cost of living adjustments each year that would equal social security pending approval by the NH Retirement System Board of trustees. The prospect of not only the initial COLA but more regular ones would be a welcome development for longtime and future retirees.

REQUEST: Please sign, write or testify in FAVOR of this

legislation: <http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/house/committees/remotetestimony/default.aspx>

Public Hearing: 1/13/2022 at 9:00 a.m. Location: Legislative Office Building Time: 9:00 a.m.

Relative to the reduction in the calculation of state retirement annuities at age 65 – SB 434

This piece of legislation would matchup the 10% reduction that happens on Group I pensions at age 65 to the person's actual full social security age which now for most people is 67. This bill for that time period would mean and important adjustment for those 2 years for retired educators who are in the Group I pool of retirees.

REQUEST: Please sign, write or testify in FAVOR of this

legislation: <http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/house/committees/remotetestimony/default.aspx>

Public Hearing: 1/13/2022 at 9:20 a.m. Location: State House Time: 9:20 a.m.

Some of the other Important Bills We are Following this Week:

Wednesday 1/14

HB 1655-FN, relative to natural immunity system health and wellness curriculum in schools

HB 1561-FN, relative to school nutrition standards

Thursday 1/13

HB 1399 – relative to school district withdrawal from a cooperative school district

HB 1366 – relative to cooperative school board reapportionment

HB 1646 – relative to representation on a cooperative school district board

HB 1276 – allowing for school district budgets and warrant articles to include cost per student information

HB 1676-FN-A-L – relative to making incentive grants for school districts that improve in certain assessment scores

HB 1137 – relative to the duty of school boards to provide education.

HB 1169 – relative to public comment and inquiry during school board meetings

SB 420 – establishing an extraordinary need grant for schools

If you have questions on any of these bills or ones not mentioned here, please feel free to contact Brian Hawkins, NEA-NH Director of Government Relations at bhawkins@nhnea.org.