

Legislative Update, Tuesday, January 23, 2018

Legislative Activity Starts Slowly with a Few Bills in Committee

The [Senate Education Committee](#) meets tomorrow morning. The committee chair is retired NEA-New Mexico member [Senator Bill Soules](#). The committee will hear his measure [Senate Bill 36](#). While the measure, adding some \$375 million dollars to school funding, can't pass this year, it is important to keep reminding legislators and the public how woefully underfunded public schools really are. Asked Senators to support this important concept and to make real progress on sufficiently funding our public schools.

[Senator Howie Morales](#) has a bill before the committee that can both improve health outcomes for New Mexicans and increase funding for public schools. His [Senate Bill 25](#) increases the excise tax on cigarettes from \$1.66 per pack of 20 cigarettes to \$3.16 per pack. The qualifying tribal cigarette tax is increased from \$0.75 per pack of 20 cigarettes to \$2.25 per pack. The bill increases the excise tax on other tobacco products from 25 percent of the product value to 76 percent of the product value and includes e-cigarettes in the definition of tobacco products. The Legislative Finance Committee (LFC) estimates that changes in [Senate Bill 25](#) will result in \$80.2 million in distributions to the public school fund in FY19. In FY18, general fund appropriations for public schools totaled \$2.696 billion, or 44.3 percent of total general fund appropriations. The intent of the legislation is to increase the overall share of general fund appropriations for public schools. Tobacco use remains the single largest cause of preventable death and disease in our state. An estimated 2,600 New Mexicans die from tobacco-related illnesses each year including cancer, heart disease, and respiratory illnesses.

Without strong action to reduce tobacco use, 40,000 New Mexican children alive today will die prematurely from smoking. Higher tobacco taxes are a win-win-win for states: a health win that reduces smoking and saves lives;

a fiscal win as it raises much-needed revenue; and a political win that is popular with the public. A 2015 poll indicated that 81 percent of likely voters support a \$1.50-per-pack increase in the state cigarette tax, with the revenue dedicated to increasing funding for health programs and early childhood education. The measure is supported by a coalition comprised of the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, American Heart Association, American Lung Association, American Federation of Teachers-New Mexico, the Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids, the March of Dimes, Health Action New Mexico, National Education Association New Mexico, New Mexico Cancer Center, New Mexico Allied Council on Tobacco, New Mexico Voices for Children, and Keres. The measure is co-sponsored in the House of Representatives by [Representative Liz Thompson](#). The measure has yet to be scheduled for a hearing in the House.

Contact [Senate Education Committee](#) members and other legislators and tell them why this is an important funding measure for public schools and an important measure for health care in New Mexico.

School Budget Proposals Will Be Heard, But Not Acted Upon, Tomorrow Afternoon

[The House Appropriations and Finance Committee](#) will hear the public school support [proposals of the governor](#) and the [Legislative Finance Committee](#) tomorrow afternoon. While no action will be taken, watching the webcast of this committee will be very informative. We will begin a more in-depth analysis of the budget proposals later this week. Follow this [link to see webcasts](#) of legislative proceedings.