

TO: Hailey Bibbee, Administrative Associate
FROM: Marybeth Beller, Faculty Senate Liaison to Government Affairs Committee
DATE: January 22, 2026
RE: Committee Report

The Government Affairs Committee met January 8th. The committee heard updates from Charlotte Weber and Sara Payne Scarbro from the university's Government Affairs office. MU Day at the Legislature is scheduled for February 3rd. The administration is hoping to have heavy representation from the Marshall community. In your email inboxes on Monday, January 19 you received Sara's Capitol Column newsletter that has details of the legislative session and details of MU Day at the Legislature. Please read it and make plans to attend. The Government Affairs Committee requested talking points for faculty so that we can be better equipped to meet with legislators. Sara and Charlotte indicated those would be forthcoming.

Currently 29 bills affecting higher education have been introduced. Of those, four are sponsored by leadership and are therefore likely to pass. Two are directed toward community and technical colleges: SB 445 (sponsored by the President), establishing the Learn and Earn program for community and technical colleges and HB 4693 (sponsored by both the Speaker and Education Chair) to declassify CTE teaching positions for counties to provide additional funding for certain positions. The bill maintains that state funding would continue to be made available for these positions, but now, if counties wanted to appropriate funds to boost the salaries of some faculty in the trades, they may not directly do so because such funding must be divided among all classified teaching positions.

The remaining two bills sponsored by leadership are currently on the floor in the House.

HB 4002 (co-sponsored by Education Chair Ellington) establishes the WV Collaboratory
This bill establishes a Collaboratory, to be housed at and operated by Marshall University with the advice of an advisory group composed of members of WVU, WVSU, the House and Senate and the Chancellor of HEPC, as well as citizens appointed by the Speaker and Senate President. The purpose of the Collaboratory is "to conduct, manage, or participate in research projects and opportunities that may be of interest to citizens and policymakers within the state, including, but not limited to, research in the areas of workforce development, public education, economic development, and natural resources management, including, but not limited to, research related to the environmental and economic components of the management of the natural resources within the state and of new technologies for habitat, environmental, and water quality improvements". It directs all state and local governments to cooperate with the Collaboratory and states that any work of the Collaboratory will not be subject to Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests. The State Treasurer's Office provided a fiscal note with no information, other than to say the Collaboratory would be funded out of a special fund.

The bill is on Second Reading in the House Special Calendar for tomorrow.

HB 4081 (co-sponsored by the Speaker and Education Chair) creates the Higher Education Health and Aid Grant which is to be funded out of general revenue appropriated to the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission (HEPC). The purpose of the program is to provide grants to

state institutions of higher education that have one or more campuses to address student food insecurity and student health and hygiene inadequacies. The fiscal note had no details of costs. The bill is on Third Reading in the House Special Calendar for tomorrow.

Finally, another bill in the House is not sponsored by leadership but does have seven co-sponsors, three of whom are on the Education Committee (Chiarelli, Crouse and Willis). It could grow legs. HB 4587, Higher Education Accountability expands a federal ban on use of direct student loans (PL119-21, section 84001) for students to major in “low earning programs.” This is measured by taking the cohorts graduating in a major and measuring their median earnings over a 3-year span. If the median earnings do not meet or exceed the median earnings of employees in that field who do not have a degree, the degree program is defined as “low earning.” This bill would forbid public money to be spent in any way on low earning programs.

The Government Affairs Committee will meet again on February 5th, at 2:00, in TEAMS.