

TO: Kelli Johnson, Faculty Senate Recording Secretary

FROM: Marybeth Beller, Faculty Senate Liaison to Government Affairs Committee

DATE: February 19, 2026

RE: Committee Report

The Government Affairs Committee met February 5th. We tentatively passed a resolution to send to Faculty Senate and agreed to send it out electronically to members who could not attend the meeting so that they could consider it. A majority confirmed the resolution.

Following are the bills relevant to Higher Education, and particularly Marshall University. It is worth noting that, other than appropriations bills, the deadline has passed to introduce new bills into the House. After Monday, February 23, no new bills can be introduced into the Senate. Therefore, this is the near total number of bills we are following.

Two bills (HB 4002 and HB 4081) brought to the Faculty Senate's attention last month have now passed the House and are in Senate Education:

HB 4002 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.

HB 4081 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.

HB 4592 mandates that higher education campuses create digital campus maps, including floor plans in all buildings, using software that local emergency first responders can access, and that the institutions of higher education provide these to all first emergency responders. This bill has also passed the House and is now in Senate Education.

HB4958 creates a five-year program, the Southern Coalfield Resiliency and Revitalization Program, which will identify existing resources in the coalfield counties of Boone, Logan, McDowell, Mingo and Wyoming to identify resources in those areas that can enhance economic

development and direct state resources toward those counties for the purposes of collaborating with businesses to further economic development in the area. The bill creates a Revitalization Council to govern this program and states that a representative from the Marshall University Center for Business and Economic Research will sit on that council. The program will be housed in the WV Division of Economic Development and will report annually to the governor. The bill mandates that no hiring may take place to fulfill the purpose of the program. This bill is on third reading in the House tomorrow, February 20th.

SB 781 removes surplus funds from the general revenue and moves them to a Civil Contingency Fund for use in matching grants. While the bill does not specifically mention higher education, it is filed under Higher Education in the bill database. It passed the Senate and is in House Finance.

The following bills are not moving but should be studied and followed carefully as they will affect us if they pass and they are likely to return next year if they fail to gain traction this year.

Two bills require institutions of higher education to either exempt the vaccination requirement for students who have religious objections (SB 609) or to ban the requirement entirely for all faculty, staff and students (HB 5111).

SB 41 and 69 require higher education acceptance of the Classic Learning Test (CLT) as an alternative to the SAT or ACT for assessing a student's college readiness. The CLT is used by many home-schooling parents and charter schools.

SB 202 provides free tuition for a variety of first responders and their families as well as disabled veterans and military personnel. It provides no funding to universities to cover this loss of tuition revenue.

SB 414 requires higher education accrediting bodies to remove any requirements for DEIA practices for institutions to receive accreditation.

SB 483 creates the WV Officials Training Act. This would make use of a variety of sources to establish quality training for state and local elected officials. It will be operated out of the state auditor's office. While it is not currently moving, this might be a bill for the university to investigate as many of our programs are equipped to provide that training.

Finally, there are two bills which seek to restore voting rights to all members of higher education boards of governors. SB 551 restores voting rights to student, faculty and staff members of those bodies and SB 675 restores voting rights to student members only. Neither bill is moving, but faculty might want to reach out to Senators Mike Woelfel and Joey Garcia who sponsored the bill to restore rights to all members of the governing boards.

A bill discussed in this report last month is still not moving but should be considered: HB 4587 (and its Senate counterpart, SB 618), the Higher Education Accountability Act, will expand 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.

After March 4th any bill that has not passed its house of origin dies, so watch for these bills to see if they move before then.

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