



LEGISLATIVE *Update*

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House and Senate Swap SPA, Budget Legislation

SEANC's Legislative Affairs team had its hands full this week, with possibly the two most important bills of the General Assembly session for state employees moving from one side of the building to the other. The N.C. House finally got its turn at the state budget, while the N.C. Senate began work on a House bill that Gov. Pat McCrory is pushing that would rewrite parts of the State Personnel Act.

Last week the N.C. Senate passed its version of the state budget, and this week the House Appropriations subcommittees got their shot at crafting legislation that will fund government operations for the next two years. The House subcommittees will forward their recommendations to the main appropriations chairmen who will unveil the House budget for a vote on the week of June 10.

In addition to advocating for a modest pay increase and retiree cost-of-living adjustment, SEANC is fighting for many programs that were cut in the Senate budget, particularly in the Departments of Public Safety and Health and Human Services. Among these programs, SEANC lobbyists urged lawmakers to keep 50 positions cut in the Senate budget from the DHHS Oral Health section. DHHS provides dental hygienists that go into rural schools and protect the dental health of this state's most vulnerable citizens: poor and impoverished children. The hygienists provide dental sealants to children, many of whom have never been to a dentist before and provide a much needed service.

SEANC also continued its work to maintain the prisons slated for closure (Bladen, Duplin, Robeson, Wayne, Buncombe and Orange), the Lenoir, Buncombe and Richmond Youth Development Centers and for State Highway Patrol communications jobs.

State Personnel Act Rewrite Heads to Senate

Meanwhile the N.C. Senate had its first look at H.B. 834, the State Personnel Act rewrite under consideration. SEANC strongly opposes this move that would gut certain employee protections and their right to grievances and appeals.

SEANC remains strongly opposed to the bill that passed through the House because the bad still outweighs the good. The bill still makes grievance hearings political and puts state employees in danger of losing their job to a political hire.

GRIEVANCE HEARINGS BECOME POLITICAL – SEANC is strongly advocating for maintaining the current SPA language which places the independent Office of Administrative Hearings in charge of employee grievances. The OAH is currently charged with hearing and ruling on acts of alleged unlawful employment practices in state government giving state employees a fair and impartial body to judge the merits of grievances.

Specifically H.B. 834 would remove state employees' right to appeal firings to an independent forum at the OAH. Instead employees would appeal to the State Personnel Commission, made up of political appointees of the governor and legislative leaders. The SPC is under the authority of the governor and concerns itself with personnel administration. Thus the SPC is not independent; it is a commission that

places political appointees in the position of judging the merit of an employee's grievance from another political appointee.

In other words, it's like having a fox guarding the henhouse.

POLITICAL PATRONAGE – Another sticking point in the bill is that during reorganizations in state government employees who were reduced in force “not actually or accurately based on their skills and qualifications” could not appeal to be reinstated to the state workforce., this provision could lead to wholesale firings and a return to the Wild West of state employment where political patronage, nepotism and cronyism rule state government.

SEANC strongly encourages employees who are affected by both of these bills to contact the Legislative Affairs staff and come to Raleigh to advocate on behalf of the public service that you provide to the state. We are pleased to schedule appointments and accompany you on these vital visits to your legislators.

The SEANC Legislative Update is published when the N.C. General Assembly is in session by SEANC's Legislative Affairs Department. For more information, contact Legislative Affairs Director Ardis Watkins at awatkins@seanc.org.