

Lujan Grisham signs trapping ban, education package

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In this file photo from last month, Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham signs into law a bill authorizing \$200 million in grants for small businesses statewide. She faces a Friday deadline to act on more than 130 bills. (Eddie Moore/Albuquerque Journal)

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SANTA FE – Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham began a critical week Monday by signing legislation that will deliver extra money to some schools and ban animal trapping on public land – a burst of action as she faces a Friday deadline to act on dozens of bills.

She approved 50 bills altogether Monday, touching on public financing for judicial candidates, community solar projects and medical debt.

Much of Monday's action centered on children – including the creation of an independent office to review special education and a ban on hair discrimination in schools.

Two of the measures are expected to send more money to schools serving large Native American communities and low-income families. Still awaiting action by Friday are proposals that would require private employers to offer paid sick leave, establish a Civil Rights Act and allow medical aid in dying.

But Lujan Grisham signed a number of bills Monday.

A wildlife measure she approved, Senate Bill 32, passed the House this month by one vote, 35-34. The legislation will ban traps, snares and wildlife poisons on public land.

Jessica Johnson of Animal Protection Voters described it as the culmination of a decade of work to protect animals from unnecessary cruelty. The measure is named after Roxy, a dog who died of strangulation by a snare in 2018.

The bill, Johnson said, will “enhance the life of humans as well as companion animals, boost the safety of communities, and continue the important work of conservation and protection of the wildlife and public lands across New Mexico.”

Education measures

Approval of the education legislation, meanwhile, comes as New Mexico confronts the loss of in-person classroom time during the COVID-19 pandemic, on top of already-poor academic outcomes.

One measure signed Monday, House Bill 6, is expected to send an extra \$60 million in federal Impact Aid to districts with vast amounts of tribal and other tax-exempt land. The state had previously deducted much of the federal money from the districts' funding allocation, blocking the funds from reaching their intended target.

Lujan Grisham said the legislation ends “a long-standing practice that was fundamentally unfair, disadvantaging too many Native American students and communities.”

Another measure, Senate Bill 17, is expected to distribute \$30 million over the next two years to schools serving a concentration of low-income families. The funding is for math, reading and other programs to support students.

“The need is great, and resources are limited,” Public Education Secretary Ryan Stewart said in a written statement. “That’s why it’s critical to target extra funding to the schools where it is most needed.”

Also signed Monday is legislation, Senate Bill 42, that will increase taxpayer-funded contributions into the pension system for educators. It calls for employers to boost their contributions into the fund by 1 percentage point each of the next two years, an amount expected to cost \$34 million next year and \$68 million the year after that.

The bills signed Monday also included measures on the environment, elections and health care.

She signed bills that will protect low-income New Mexicans from medical debt collection, make New Mexico the first state to extend public financing to District Court judicial candidates and enable groups of energy consumers to participate in community solar projects.

Budget awaits action

A \$7.4 billion budget plan is awaiting action this week – an appropriations bill for which Lujan Grisham has line-item veto authority. Also on deck are bills to expand tax breaks for working families and create a citizens’ redistricting committee.

Any bill the governor doesn’t sign or veto by Friday is automatically rejected, a procedure known as a pocket veto. The deadline applies to bills passed in the final days of the regular 60-day session, which ended March 20.

A proposal to legalize retail sales of marijuana, by contrast, has extra time. It was passed in last week’s special session, so the governor has until April 20 to act.

As for the regular session, Lujan Grisham has signed 67 bills and vetoed one – out of 158 bills sent to her by legislators.

Lujan Grisham, a Democrat in her first term, has generally vetoed far fewer bills than her predecessor, Republican Susana Martinez. Democrats hold majorities in both legislative chambers.

Monday’s approvals include:

- Senate Bill 140, updating New Mexico’s child support laws to avoid the loss of \$148 million in federal funding.
- House Bill 222, establishing an ombudsman’s office to investigate and resolve problems with special education.

- House Bill 29 and Senate Bill 80, prohibiting discrimination in schools based on a student's cultural headdress or certain hairstyles, such as braids, cornrows or weaves.
- House Bill 6, sending an extra \$60 million to school districts that have a small tax base because they cover tax-exempt land for Native American communities and military bases.
- Senate Bill 17, distributing extra funding to certain schools based on a family income index.
- Senate Bill 32, banning traps, snares and wildlife poisons on public land.
- Senate Bill 160, extending public financing to District Court candidates.
- Senate Bill 84, establishing a Community Solar Act.
- Senate Bill 42, increasing taxpayer contributions to the educator pension system.