



Highlights from the 56th New Mexico Legislature State Legislative Effectiveness Scores

Craig Volden and Alan E. Wiseman, Co-Directors, Center for Effective Lawmaking

Paige Higginson-Rollins, Program Director for State Legislatures, Center for Effective Lawmaking

Caroline Clements, Program Specialist for State Legislatures, Center for Effective Lawmaking

5/6/2026

Executive Summary

The Center for Effective Lawmaking (CEL) is pleased to announce the release of the State Legislative Effectiveness Scores (SLES) for the recently completed 56th New Mexico Legislature legislative session (2023-2024). This report offers highlights from our initial analyses of these scores, including:

- We identify the top 10 most effective lawmakers in the majority party in the New Mexico House and Senate, the top 10 most effective minority lawmakers in the New Mexico House, and the top 5 most effective minority leaders in the New Mexico Senate. Many listed lawmakers continued their highly effective lawmaking patterns from the previous legislative session.
- We identify those lawmakers with the longest streaks of being in our prestigious “Above Expectations” category, as well as first-term lawmakers in this category.
- We find that, consistent with our published research findings, there is an overall lawmaking benefit from being in the majority party. During the 2023-2024 legislative session, majority-party Democratic lawmakers consistently received higher State Legislative Effectiveness Scores (SLES) and achieved better bill outcomes in comparison to minority-party Republican lawmakers. Despite Republicans holding over 1/3rd of the seats in each chamber, of the 276 laws produced during the 2023-2024 session, only 41 were sponsored by Republicans, which is notably out of proportion to their seat share. This gap demonstrates the institutional advantages of majority-party association in New Mexico.
- Serving as a committee chair is related to greater lawmaking effectiveness. This phenomenon is highlighted during the 56th New Mexico Legislature legislative session, where many of the most effective majority-party lawmakers held committee chair positions.

- In addition, our findings indicate that effective lawmakers in one session are likely to remain effective lawmakers across multiple sessions, as several legislators appear on the top-10 lists in both the 2023-2024 and 2021-2022 legislative sessions.

Introduction and Methodology

The State Legislative Effectiveness Scores discussed here are based on the combination of fifteen metrics capturing the bills that each member of each state legislature sponsors, how far their bills move through the lawmaking process, and how substantial their policy proposals are. The scores are normalized to an average value of 1.0 in both the House of Representatives and the State Senate in each legislative session. More on our [methodology](#) and [scores](#) can be found at our website.

For each member of the House of Representatives and State Senate, we also identify a Benchmark Score, based on the average lawmaking effectiveness of legislators who share that legislator’s majority- or minority-party status, level of seniority, and chair position on a committee. Controlling for these considerations is important in order to describe legislators on a more level playing field. For example, in the 56th New Mexico House of Representatives, minority-party lawmakers had an average SLES of 0.57 compared to 1.25 for majority-party members, while committee chairs had an average SLES of 1.64. In the State Senate, those averages were 0.46 in the minority party, 1.34 in the majority party, and 1.58 among committee chairs.

We then label each lawmaker as “Above Expectations” for those outperforming their benchmark scores by 50% or more, “Below Expectations” for those below 50% of their benchmark, and “Meeting Expectations” for all other legislators.

Finally, within each party, we rank each member according to their SLES. This ranking is used to generate the lists of top performers highlighted in the tables below. Given the substantial lawmaking benefit that follows from being in the majority party, ranking the entire New Mexico Legislature together would be inappropriate, but these comparisons within each party are quite informative.

Highly Effective Democratic Lawmakers in the 56th New Mexico House of Representatives

The following table identifies the ten highest-scoring Democrats in the 2023-2024 House of Representatives. Six of the top ten were committee chairs.

Top Ten List—House Democrats (2023-2024 Legislative Session)

	<u>Name</u>	<u>LES</u>	<u>Committee Chair</u>
1.	Elizabeth “Liz” Thomson (District 24)	3.32	Chair
2.	Linda Serrato (District 45)	2.82	None
3.	Gail Chasey (District 18)	2.80	None
4.	Derrick J. Lente (District 65)	2.80	Chair

5.	Joy Garratt (District 29)	2.57	None
6.	Dayan Hochman-Vigil (District 15)	2.54	Chair
7.	Reena Szczepanski (District 47)	2.41	None
8.	Andrea Romero (District 46)	2.36	Chair
9.	Kristina Ortez (District 42)	2.13	Chair
10.	Christine Chandler (District 43)	2.10	Chair

At the top of the list is Representative Elizabeth “Liz” Thomson from District 24 (Bernalillo County) with a score of 3.32. In the 2023-2024 legislative session, she introduced 30 bills, 25 of which received action in committee and action beyond committee, 7 of which passed the House of Representatives, and 6 of which became law.

Rep. Thomson first served in the House from 2013-2015, returning in 2017. Rep. Thomson holds a B.S. in physical therapy from the University of New Mexico and currently works as a pediatric physical therapist. In the community, Rep. Thomson is affiliated with the American Federation of Teachers and advocates for educational opportunities for New Mexico's children.

Three Democratic Representatives on our current list were also among the top-10 highest scorers in the 2021-2022 legislative session: Rep. Joy Garratt (District 29), Rep. Dayan Hochman-Vigil (District 15), and Christine Chandler (District 43).

Highly Effective Republican Lawmakers in the 56th New Mexico House of Representatives

The following table identifies the top ten highest scorers in the 2023-2024 House of Representatives among minority-party Republicans.

Top Ten List—House Republicans (2023-2024 Legislative Session)

	<u>Name</u>	<u>LES</u>	<u>Seniority</u>
1.	Greg Nibert (District 59)	1.66	4
2.	T. Ryan Lane (District 3)	1.37	2
3.	Martin R. Zamora (District 63)	1.21	3
4.	Gail Armstrong (District 49)	1.10	4
5.	Jason Harper (District 57)	1.03	6
6.	William “Bill” Rehm (District 31)	1.02	10
7.	Cathrynn Brown (District 55)	0.99	7
8.	Andrea Reeb (District 64)	0.84	1
9.	Stefani Lord (District 22)	0.70	2
10.	Candy Spence Ezzell (District 58)	0.55	10

Topping our list is Representative Greg Nibert of District 59 (Chaves and Lincoln counties) with a State Legislative Effectiveness Score of 1.66. He introduced 15 bills in the 2023-2024 legislative session: 11 received action in committee and action beyond committee, 5 passed the House, and 4 became law.

Rep. Nibert assumed office in 2017 and served as the Minority House Whip in 2023. He was appointed to the New Mexico State Senate in January 2024, leaving his House seat vacant. Before his service in the House, Rep. Nibert served on the Chaves County Commission for two terms and on the Roswell Independent School District Board of Education. Rep. Nibert holds a B.A. in economics and political science from the University of New Mexico and a J.D. from Pepperdine University Law School. He is an attorney and a former partner at Hinkle Shanor LLP. In the community, Rep. Nibert has been involved in the Independent Petroleum Association of New Mexico; Kiwanis International; and the Foundation for Natural Resource, Energy, and Environmental Law. In 2025, Governor Michelle Grisham appointed Rep. Nibert to the New Mexico Public Regulation Commission.

Five Republican Representatives on our current list were also among the top-10 highest scoring Republicans in the 2021-2022 legislative session: Rep. Greg Nibert (District 59), Rep. Gail Armstrong (District 49), Rep. Jason Harper (District 57), Rep. William “Bill” Rehm (District 31), and Rep. Cathrynn Brown (District 55).

Highly Effective Democratic Lawmakers in the 56th New Mexico State Senate

The following table identifies the ten highest-scoring Democrats in the 2023-2024 State Senate. Five of the top ten most effective lawmakers in the Senate were committee chairs.

Top Ten List—Senate Democrats (2023-2024 Legislative Session)

	<u>Name</u>	<u>LES</u>	<u>Committee Chair</u>
1.	George Muñoz (District 4)	2.80	Chair
2.	Elizabeth “Liz” Stefanics (District 39)	2.76	Chair
3.	Michael Padilla (District 14)	2.16	None
4.	Mimi Stewart (District 17)	2.11	Chair
5.	Nancy Rodriguez (District 24)	1.90	None
6.	Peter Wirth (District 25)	1.80	None
7.	Pete Campos (District 8)	1.79	None
8.	Gerald Ortiz y Pino (District 12)	1.73	Chair
9.	William Soules (District 37)	1.70	Chair
10.	Roberto Gonzales (District 6)	1.61	None

Among Democrats in the State Senate, Senator George Muñoz from District 4 (Cibola, McKinley, and San Juan counties) ranked first with a SLES score of 2.80. In the 2023-2024 legislative session, he introduced 52 bills, 30 received action in committee, and 27 received action beyond committee. 20 passed the Senate and 11 became law.

Sen. Muñoz assumed office in 2009. He attended the University of Arizona. Sen. Muñoz is the owner of the Muñoz Corporation, a firm specializing in construction and infrastructure development. Outside of his primary business, he manages several real estate development entities and logistics groups. He has also served on the board of directors for several regional banking institutions, including Pinnacle Bank.

Nine legislators on the list were among the top 10 highest-scoring Democratic Senators in the 2021-2022 legislative session: Sen. George Muñoz (District 4), Sen. Elizabeth “Liz” Stefanics (District 39), Sen. Michael Padilla (District 14), Sen. Mimi Stewart (District 17), Sen. Nancy Rodriguez (District 24), Pete Campos (District 8), Sen. Gerald Ortiz y Pino (District 12), Sen. William Soules (District 37), and Sen. Roberto Gonzales (District 6).

Highly Effective Republican Lawmakers in the 56th New Mexico State Senate

The following table identifies the five most effective Republican lawmakers in the 2023-2024 State Senate.

Top Five Senate Republicans (2023-2024 Legislative Session)

	<u>Name</u>	<u>LES</u>	<u>Seniority</u>
1.	Steven Neville (District 2)	0.96	10
2.	Crystal Brantley (District 35)	0.87	2
3.	Craig W. Brandt (District 40)	0.82	6
4.	Cliff Pirtle (District 32)	0.67	6
5.	William “Bill” Sharer (District 1)	0.60	12

Senator Steven Neville of District 2 (San Juan County) had the highest SLES for Senate Republicans in the 2023-2024 legislative session with a score of 0.96. He introduced 13 bills in the 2023-2024 legislative session, 11 of which received action in committee and action beyond committee, 6 of which passed the Senate, and 3 of which became law.

Sen. Neville joined the Senate in 2004 and resigned from office in 2024. Sen. Neville holds an undergraduate and graduate degree from New Mexico State University and has been working in real estate consulting and investment since 1985. In the community, he has served as the National Chairman of the Energy Council and as President of the San Juan Board of Realtors. Currently, he is the chair of the Board of Regents at Western New Mexico University.

Two legislators on the list were among the top 5 highest-scoring Senate Republicans in the 2021-2022 legislative session: Sen. Steven Neville (District 2) and Sen. Craig W. Brandt (District 40).

Lawmakers with Long-Standing Patterns of “Above Expectations”

Those who significantly exceed their benchmark score, which is calculated based on their seniority and status as a majority party member and/or committee chairperson, are identified as being in our “Above Expectations” category. The lists below identify the Representatives and Senators with the longest active streaks of exceeding expectations in consecutive sessions continuing through (and including) the 2023-2024 legislative session.

**State Representatives with Longest Streak of “Above Expectations”
(through the 2023-2024 Legislative Session)**

	<u>Name</u>	<u>Streak</u>	<u>SLES (2023-2024)</u>	<u>Seniority</u>
1.	Dayan Hochman-Vigil (D-15)	3 Legislative Sessions	2.54	3 Legislative Sessions
2.	Jason Harper (R-57)	3 Legislative Sessions	1.03	6 Legislative Sessions

Democratic Representative Dayan Hochman-Vigil of District 15 (Bernalillo County) had the longest streak of "Above Expectations" with 3 legislative sessions and a SLES score of 2.54 in the 2023-2024 legislative session. During the 2023-2024 legislative session, she proposed 28 bills, 18 of which received action in committee and action beyond committee and 6 of which passed the House and became law. In addition, Rep. Hochman-Vigil has ranked among the top 10 highest-scoring Democratic Representatives since 2021.

Rep. Hochman-Vigil joined the House in 2019 and currently serves as the House Majority Whip. Rep. Hochman-Vigil holds a B.A. from Colorado College, a master’s degree in aviation and space law from McGill University, and a J.D. from the University of New Mexico School of Law. She previously worked as a regulatory attorney in D.C., frequently working with the federal aviation agencies. In 2016, she returned to New Mexico. In 2019, she opened her own practice and is the only private, certified expert in aviation and space law in the State of New Mexico.

**State Senator with Longest Streak of “Above Expectations”
(through the 2023-2024 Legislative Session)**

	<u>Name</u>	<u>Streak</u>	<u>SLES (2023-2024)</u>	<u>Seniority</u>
1.	Michael Padilla (D-14)	3 Legislative Sessions	2.16	6 Legislative Sessions

Senator Michael Padilla (D) of District 14 (Bernalillo County) had the longest streak of "Above Expectations" with 3 legislative sessions and a SLES of 2.16 in the 2023-2024 legislative session. During the 2023-2024 legislative session, Sen. Padilla proposed 42 bills. 27 received action in committee, 26 received action beyond committee, 13 passed the Senate, and 9 became law. Sen. Padilla has consistently ranked among the top-10 most effective Democratic Senators since 2017.

Sen. Padilla assumed office in 2013. He graduated from the University of New Mexico and the University of Phoenix and later founded Altivus CRM Solutions, a contact center and consulting firm, and remains its CEO. He also assisted the City of Albuquerque in overhauling its 311 Citizen Contact Center. In the community, Sen. Padilla has been involved in the Democratic Party of New Mexico, serving as precinct chairman, ward chairman, county central member, and state central committee member. He has also been a part of Junior Achievement of New Mexico, the New Mexico Workforce Development Board, and the Special Olympics of New Mexico.

High-Performing Freshmen

One way to identify future legislative leaders is to identify freshmen Representatives who earned an “Above Expectations” rating in their first term. Freshmen legislators’ initial scores are compared to benchmarks for newcomers—so when a freshman outperforms their cohort, it can reveal strong political acumen, the ability to navigate legislative procedures quickly, and skill in coalition-building or policy entrepreneurship. These traits often correlate with future leadership roles. Our research on the U.S. Congress suggests that legislators who perform well early on are more likely to be selected for committee chairs or leadership positions and to influence major legislation in subsequent terms. Hence, identifying high-performing freshmen can offer early signals of who might rise through the ranks.

Freshmen Representatives “Above Expectations” (2023-2024 Legislative Session)

	<u>Name</u>	<u>SLES (2023-2024)</u>
1.	Reena Szczepanski (D-47)	2.41
2.	Kathleen Cates (D-44)	1.59
3.	Andrea Reeb (R-64)	0.84

The State Representative with the highest SLES who also scored "Above Expectations" during her freshman term was Democratic Representative Reena Szczepanski (Santa Fe County) with a score of 2.41. During the 2023-2024 legislative session, Rep. Szczepanski introduced 19 bills, 10 of which received action in committee and action beyond committee and 6 of which passed the House and became law.

Rep. Szczepanski holds a B.A. in Human Biology and Community Health from Brown University. Before joining the House, she served as Chair of the Santa Fe County Health Policy and Planning Commission and as President of the New Mexico Public Health Association. She previously worked for the New Mexico Department of Health as the Hepatitis Program Manager. In the community, Rep. Szczepanski served as the State Director for the Drug Policy Alliance, focusing on public health and criminal justice reform advocacy. Rep. Szczepanski has also worked to train female leaders as the executive director of Emerge New Mexico.

Other Findings

In terms of broader patterns, consistent with a majority-party advantage in most states, this pattern is clearly on display in New Mexico. While the SLES of minority-party lawmakers across the country on the whole averages about 0.6, the average scores for minority-party Republicans in New Mexico are a bit lower than that in the House of Representatives at 0.57 and lower still in the Senate at a value of 0.46.

These differences translate into a gap in the number of laws produced by Republicans relative to Democrats. Of the 276 laws produced in the 2023-24 term, only 41 of them were sponsored by Republicans. Given that Republicans held more than a third of the seats in each chamber, this nearly 6:1 ratio in laws coming from Democrats to those coming from Republicans is notably out of proportion with the relative seat-shares, but not uncommon compared to recent legislative terms in New Mexico nor to partisan patterns found across the country.

Conclusion

The 56th New Mexico Legislature legislative session demonstrated consistent patterns in legislative effectiveness, with experienced legislators, committee chairs, and majority-party members continuing to hold an advantage in advancing their policy agendas. Across both chambers, many of the most effective lawmakers continued their high performance from previous sessions, indicating a durable capacity for lawmaking among key figures. These findings underscore the importance of institutional positions and experiences in shaping legislative outcomes in New Mexico.