



2022

STATE LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

BE BOLD: A RECOVERY THAT PUTS PEOPLE FIRST TO BUILD STRONGER, MORE INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES

Last year the legislature took bold action and made historic progress to address the inequities and failings in our social and economic structures that were further amplified throughout the pandemic. We encourage you to continue to act decisively and compassionately to tackle systemic injustice, and to preserve and restore health, safety, economic opportunity, the environment, and quality of life for all Washingtonians.

INVEST IN HOUSING

With the COVID-19 pandemic continuing to impact the state's residents, the legislature must focus on keeping Washingtonians safe, healthy, and housed. During the pandemic, King County has leveraged federal, state, and local funds to purchase and convert unused properties into housing for homeless individuals, and with the state's partnership, we can continue to capitalize on this opportunity.

- Use federal ARPA funds to build and preserve affordable homes and emergency and supportive housing for low income households and for populations experiencing chronic homelessness.
- Provide planning resources to help local governments plan for a more diverse housing supply and to prevent displacement.
- Authorize a local-option, time-limited funding source to allow local governments to acquire and operate supportive and affordable housing units through local programs like the Health Through Housing initiative.

REBUILD THE ECONOMY

The economic devastation resulting from the pandemic has been widespread but unevenly distributed. As we lay the groundwork for rebuilding the economy, we encourage the legislature to be mindful of the acute and specific economic impact borne by women and BIPOC populations in the workforce and adopt policies that address both the specific impacts and underlying conditions, to provide an economic recovery that truly lifts all residents.

- Leverage federal funds to create jobs through large-scale investments in infrastructure across a broad range of sectors – affordable housing, broadband, transit, green energy, and other public infrastructure.

- Invest in workforce development and apprenticeship programs to help residents learn new skills as a path to economic recovery.
- Expand and enhance the tax incentive program for film production.

DISMANTLE SYSTEMIC RACISM AND INJUSTICE

The legislature must continue ongoing work to make Washington an anti-racist state, dismantle systemic racism, and invest in upstream programs aligned with racial and social justice.

- Enhance public trust and confidence in law enforcement, strengthen law enforcement accountability, and provide additional clarity to previously adopted law enforcement reforms, particularly around the scope of law enforcement response to behavioral health crisis calls, while maintaining the intent of the reforms.
- Adopt legislation necessary for timely and complete implementation of an executive order that would rescind Governor's Directive 98-01, and implement race- and gender-conscious affirmative action where appropriate.
- Continue to provide counties funds to fully cover costs required to comply with the Blake decision.

BOLSTER BEHAVIORAL HEALTH AND CRISIS RESPONSE SYSTEM

COVID-19 has further exacerbated the behavioral health needs of residents across the state. We have seen that now, more than ever, our communities are counting on us to deliver a robust crisis response, complete with the outreach, treatment, and beds needed to serve people in crisis. The intricate braiding of funding from federal, state, and county sources for behavioral health care makes our partnership between state and county government increasingly essential for building the crisis response our community needs. This work is as critical as any other emergency service and, given what we know about the root causes of homelessness and criminal legal system involvement, even more so.

- Further develop and sustain the essential behavioral health workforce – including a 7 percent increase in Medicaid behavioral health rate across all service types.
- Enhance community-based responses to behavioral health crisis including leveraging existing infrastructure through behavioral health-administrative service organizations to efficiently implement the 988 behavioral health crisis line and by making new capital and operational investments in King County to ensure individuals in crisis can connect to services they need to stabilize and get well.
- Adopt policies and increase funding for programs that support individuals and families in treatment for and recovery from substance use disorders.
- Increase veterans' programs funding, especially those targeting veteran suicide prevention and homelessness.
- Fund capital investments to expand and enhance access to care for individuals with behavioral health conditions.

PROTECT OUR ENVIRONMENT

Climate change is no longer a future problem – it's happening now. Escalating natural hazards – flooding, wildfire, extreme heat – put our people, economy and environment at risk and further deepen racial inequities. Although the legislature made monumental steps last year, the extreme and unprecedented weather events in 2021, including the record setting heat wave and historically low precipitation levels throughout the spring and summer months, signal the need for additional critical action to combat climate change. We implore you to heed this warning call.

- Maximize local distribution of federal infrastructure funds, helping counties address climate change at the local level, through investments in transit, green energy, clean water and healthy habitat programs.
- Empower large-scale change by creating new state tools, such as a climate bond for big and transformative projects including bus electrification and decarbonization of public buildings.
- Continue to enhance and grow product stewardship programs to make products safer for people and the planet, from design to disposal.
- Create a capital investment grant program for long term care and other similar facilities to upgrade HVAC systems that reduce harm from wildfire smoke.
- Support updates to land use planning that take into consideration climate change and resiliency.

FIX OUR TAX STRUCTURE

Washingtonians deserve a fair, simple, and stable tax system capable of delivering basic services to all communities of the state. The services our residents and businesses have relied on to survive this pandemic are funded by a tax system that is designed to falter exactly when the services are needed most. Local governments need real and reliable local options to fund critical services.

- Replace the arbitrary property tax cap with a cap designed to keep pace with inflation and population growth.
- Provide local governments with maximum fiscal flexibility within their limited revenue streams.
- Continue work to identify and implement progressive revenue sources rather than relying on traditional regressive sources.
- Streamline local government ability to use the cultural access program.
- Refine the Long Term Care Trust Act provisions to ensure fair treatment of individuals paying the tax, and streamline implementation for all employers.

GENERAL PRIORITIES

- Maximize opportunities for local governments to access federal transportation infrastructure funds, and use infrastructure funds in a way that increases the overall share of public transit funding, that emphasizes maintenance and preservation of unincorporated roads and bridges, and that continues investing in capital improvements to state route corridors in King County.
- Provide a permanent option for local governments to conduct virtual meetings.
- Increase state resources and coordination for inter-county search and rescue efforts.

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