

AAUW WA State Legislative Update 1/29/2021

From: Nancy Sapiro nsapiro@nwjustice.net – AAUW WA Lobbyist

Week 3

AAUW's [2021 Lobby Day](#) is happening on Monday, February 1! You won't want to miss it!

Hear more about AAUW's legislative priorities, connect with other AAUW members, and take action with your state legislators. Curious how to engage in the 2021 virtual session? Learn more about [how to access the legislature remotely here](#) and get detailed information about [how to testify remotely here](#).

Time to take action on the Working Families Tax Credit (HB 1297/SB 5387)!

[HB 1297](#) will be heard in House Finance on Tuesday, February 2 at 1:30 and [SB 5387](#) will be heard in Senate Human Services on Thursday, February 4 at 1:30. One of the great parts about virtual legislative session is that Washingtonians can participate in bill hearings and show your support for important legislation from home.

We need as many people as possible to show their support for HB 1297 on Tuesday and SB 5387 on Thursday. Here's how:

- Follow [this link to sign in PRO and submit written testimony for HB 1297](#) and [this link to sign in PRO and submit written testimony for SB 5387](#)
- Make sure to sign in PRO as your position – this means you support the bill. The contact information you put into the form will be considered public record. You can type "Decline" in the address line if you do not want to share your home address.
- Clearly state your strong support for the Working Families Tax Credit and include the bill number. For example, "I am writing to share my strong support for the Working Families Tax Credit as proposed in HB 1297 and SB 5387."
- Share why you support the bill – this is a space to also share from your personal connection to the policy or why it's a priority for AAUW.

The Working Families Tax Credit would provide a \$500 annual cash payment to low- and moderate-income workers each year with an additional payment for children in the home. The tax credit would be available to families who qualify for the EITC. It would also be available to immigrant families who file with an Individual Tax Identification Number (ITIN). This new cash benefit would reach 500,000 Washingtonians and a quarter of all Washington children. The tax credit is modeled off state-based Earned Income Tax Credits, which are some of the [most-studied and best-proven anti-poverty policies](#). You can learn more about the [Working Families Tax Credit from the Washington Budget and Policy Center here](#).

Updates on AAUW's Legislative Priorities

Keep Our Care Act

In July of last year, Virginia Mason Health System and CHI Franciscan, announced plans to merge their 12 hospitals and more than 250 treatment clinics in the Puget Sound, Yakima, and central Washington regions. As of January 2021, this consolidation is complete. As a result of this merger, as well as others that have occurred over the past 10 years, access to reproductive, end of life care, and gender affirming surgery is compromised in many areas of our state.

Work is underway to introduce a bill called the Keep Our Care Act that would require a new application and review process for proposed hospital mergers, including transparency about loss of existing services, particularly abortion, end-of-life, and gender affirming services. The Keep Our Care Act would also require the state to share this information with patients and provide opportunities for the public to weigh in on how the merger would affect their access to care. The information must be used to prepare an independent health care impact statement for any proposed acquisition that must be used in considering whether the acquisition will detrimentally affect the continued existence of accessible, affordable care responsive to the needs of the community.

Removing proof of marriage in sexual assault cases (SB 5177)

In Washington statute, the language “and not married to the perpetrator” is used through the law to define who is guilty of a sex offense. Due to this, marriage can be used as a legal defense for rape – creating a loophole allowing sex offenders from out of state to avoid registering in Washington. “Ours is one of only a handful of states where our inconsistency in legal language with other states has enabled certain sex offenders to avoid registration,” [said Senator Cleveland](#), the bill’s prime sponsor. “It’s time for our state to join the rest of the modern world and ensure that sex offenders from other states are registered in our state as well.” [SB 5177](#) will remove this horrific language from statute. The bill was heard in Senate Law & Justice on January 25th and passed out of committee on January 28th.

Improving care for survivors of non-fatal strangulation (SB 5183)

[SB 5183](#) continues to make progress through the Senate. It was passed out of the Senate Human Services Committee and now heads to Ways & Means. This bill directs the Office of Crime Victims Advocacy to develop practices that local communities may voluntarily use to create more access to forensic nurse examiners in cases of nonfatal strangulation assault. It also authorizes the Crime Victims Compensation Program to pay the forensic examination costs. This bill would help survivors of domestic violence to get more appropriate care for their injuries. With non-fatal strangulation, injuries may present after the assault or much later and may persist for months and even years post-assault. This bill will help provide new resources for expanding access to trained medical staff to provide appropriate care for these injuries.

Extending Apple Health to pregnant persons through 12 months postpartum (SB 5068)

Momentum continues to grow for [SB 5068](#)! The bill was passed out of the Senate Committee on Health and Long Term Care on January 27th and it now heads to Ways & Means ahead of the fiscal cutoff.

SB 5068 will extend Medicaid coverage to 12 months postpartum. This policy passed last session with overwhelming support but was unfortunately vetoed by the governor due to the cost of the program, the emergence of the COVID crisis and the looming budgetary shortfall. Senator Randall has re-introduced the bill in 2021, with strong bi-partisan support. SB 5068 would extend postpartum Apple Health coverage from 60 days to 12 months, with the same eligibility standards as the current program (up to 198% FPL). It would also direct HCA to pursue a waiver to draw down federal matching funds. The Maternal Mortality Review Panel's [findings](#) that 30% of all pregnancy-related maternal deaths and the majority of suicides and accidental overdoses occur 43 to 365 days after delivery. There are significant racial [disparities](#) in maternal mortality rates, as well. American Indian and Alaska Native women are six to seven times as likely to die from a pregnancy related cause as white women. At the federal level, there was bipartisan legislation that would have provided federal match to states that chose to extend postpartum Medicaid to 12 months. Unfortunately, action wasn't taken on the bill before Congress adjourned. It is expected that it will be reintroduced with the beginning of the 117th session of Congress.

Protecting Pregnant Patients Act (SB 5140)

[SB 5140](#) sponsored by Senator Patty Kuderer was heard on January 20th in Senate Health. The bill is waiting to be scheduled for executive session. SB 5140 will ensure that health care providers can provide pregnant patients who are experiencing complications of pregnancy, miscarriage, or an ectopic pregnancy, the necessary care they need and that their health and lives are not placed at risk. The policy will ensure that providers are able to provide the appropriate standard of care treatment for their patients, without risk of retaliation by their employer. We have been attempting to get this policy passed for many years and are hopeful that this will be the year that we can get it across the finish line.

Abortion Coverage in Student Health Plans (HB 1009)

HB 1009 is one step closer to passage in the House! It has been referred to the House Rules Committee for review. This bill sponsored by Rep. My-Linh Thai will require abortion coverage to student health care plans. [House Bill 1009](#) aims to extend the Reproductive Parity Act to student health plans. Under the RPA, health insurance plans in Washington providing coverage for maternity care must provide equivalent coverage for abortion services. This bill was [heard in the House Committee on Health Care and Wellness on January 13th](#) and was passed out of committee quickly on January 14th.

Improving Access to Paid Family and Medical Leave (HB 1073 & SB 5097)

There has been no movement on HB 1073 or SB 5097. Both bills remain in their policy committees, although HB 1073 may be voted on in House Labor in the coming weeks. Both of

these proposals would strengthen the state's paid family and medical leave program. In the bill hearings – you can see them [here](#) and [here](#) – strong testimony was shared as to why these changes are needed to make the program more accessible to Black, Indigenous, workers of color, low-income workers, and workers whose hours have been impacted by COVID-19 layoffs.

The bills vary slightly, but generally they would:

- **Expand family definition to also include chosen family.** Families all look different, and our society benefits when loved ones provide care for someone who is critically ill. States like New Jersey, Oregon, Connecticut, and Colorado all have this more inclusive family definition.
- **Expand job protection for workers who have been on the job for 90 days.** Every other state program has much more extensive job protection requirements, and all but Connecticut also require expanded continuation of health insurance. A pandemic is no time to lose health insurance or risk your job!
- **Reduce the hours worked requirement down to \$1,000 in earnings or about 73 hours:** With 2020 reduced hours and layoffs, many won't meet the 820 hour qualifying threshold in 2021. Washington imposes a higher threshold than 8 of the 9 other state programs. Oregon requires \$1,000 in earnings; California, with the oldest program, requires just \$300.

Fair Starts for Kids Act (SB 5237/HB 1213)

Both [HB 1213](#) and [SB 5237](#) have been scheduled to be voted on in their respective policy committees next. These bills aim to address Washington's child care crisis.

Nearly 550,000 children in Washington state do not have access to child care [according to Child Care Aware](#). The Fair Start for Kids Act, HB 1213/SB 5237, aims to address years of underinvestment in early childhood education. This legislation would require substantial new investments in Washington's early learning system. The legislation addresses a range of investments related to early learning, including:

- Increased subsidy rates for providers, providing access to health care for providers
- Lower co-pays for Working Connections Child Care families (the state's child care subsidy program)
- Increased eligibility for Working Connections Child Care to families at or below 85% of state median income
- Expanded Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) eligibility
- Capital investments in child care facilities
- Expansion of a statewide mental health consultation program

Wealth tax (HB 1406)

Sponsored by Rep. Frame with Rep. Sullivan at number two, [HB 1406](#) would institute a new tax on extraordinary intangible wealth and assets. Washington would be the first state in the country to pass a wealth tax. This policy is specifically designed to target billionaires. According to Forbes, Washington is home to nine of the wealthiest people in the world and their wealth ranges from \$2.7 - \$179 billion. This proposal would institute a 1% tax on financial intangible assets, exempting the first \$1 billion of assessed value. The bill will be heard on February 2 at 1:30 in House Finance.

Capital gains tax (SB 5096)

There has been no movement on the capital gains tax since the Governor's proposal was heard in the first part of session. [SB 5096](#) proposes a 9% tax rate starting January 1, 2022. Supporters organized by Balance Our Tax Code and the Invest in Washington Coalition testified in support of the policy, which is projected to raise over \$1 billion in the coming budget cycle and more than \$2 billion in future cycles. [You can watch the bill hearing here](#). More proposals on new, progressive revenue are expected to come forward in both the House and Senate.