

AAUW WA State Legislative Update 2/5/2021

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Week 4

On Monday, AAUW members rallied at the virtual capitol to support the organization's 2021 legislative priorities. Attendees met with other AAUW members, signed-in to support priority bill hearings, and learned more about how things are shaking out in Washington's first-ever virtual legislative session.

Did you miss virtual lobby day? With legislative session taking place online and over Zoom, there are more ways to engage on the issues you care about. more about [how to access the legislature remotely here](#) and get detailed information about [how to testify remotely here](#).

Next week will be jam-packed with hearings in House Finance on new, progressive revenue proposals:

- **[HB 1465](#)**: A more progressive estate tax to invest in housing services and homelessness prevention. If you would like to sign in, here is the link: <https://bit.ly/3oTQcqK>
- **[HB 1494](#)**: Would reduce the property tax burden and prevent displacement of BIPOC and elderly homeowners. To register your support, go here: <https://bit.ly/39LiiQK>
- **[HB 1496](#)**: Would Implement a capital gains tax on Washington's wealthiest households on extraordinary profits on stocks, bonds, and real estate and invest revenue in small businesses, direct cash assistance, and child care to drive economic recovery. Here is the link to sign in: <https://bit.ly/3jgaJEQ>

Washington has the most unbalanced, broken tax system in the country. Our state's combination of tax loopholes and special deals for the rich means the wealthiest among us get richer while regular working families pay more — as much as 6 times the rate the wealthiest pay. It doesn't have to be this way. New, progressive revenue combined with investments to build thriving communities can turn our upside-down tax code right-side up.

Updates on AAUW's Legislative Priorities

Working Families Tax Credit ([HB 1297](#) / [SB 5387](#))

The Working Families Tax Credit was heard in a series of stand-out hearings this week. On Tuesday, over 1,100 people signed in PRO to support HB 1297, sponsored by Representative Thai. Powerful testimony was shared by farm workers, child care providers, and anti-hunger advocates in support of the bill. SB 5387, the Senate companion, was heard on Thursday and also saw strong support. HB 1297 passed out of committee on February 4th and will **now move to Appropriations**.

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 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](#).

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

[HB 1213](#) and [SB 5237](#) have both been voted out of their respective policy committees and now **head to the House and Senate fiscal committees** (Appropriations and Ways & Means).

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, looks 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:

- 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 75% of state median income
- Expanded Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) eligibility
- Expansion of a statewide mental health consultation program

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

HB 1073 and SB 5097 are continuing to move forward. HB 1073 is **scheduled for executive session on February 4** and **SB 5097 is scheduled for exec on February 10**. Both bills are being amended to reduce the scope of the bills. HB 1073 has been narrowed to primarily address employees whose hours were reduced due to COVID-19 and no longer meet the 820 hours worked requirement for PFML. SB 5097 expands job protection and health insurance continuation for workers using the leave – current protections are restricted to workers who qualify for the federal Family and Medical Leave Act. Both bills change the definition of family to include chosen family.

Protecting Pregnant Patients Act (SSB 5140)

[SB 5140](#) sponsored by Senator Patty Kuderer is **now in Senate Rules** on second reading, waiting to be pulled to the floor. 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 remains **in 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.

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 passed out of committee on January 28th and is **now in the Senate Rules Committee**.

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

[SB 5183](#) has been scheduled for an upcoming hearing in **Ways & Means on February 9th**. 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 is **in Ways & Means awaiting a hearing**.

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.

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.

OTHER BILLS OF INTEREST

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 was heard in House Finance in the same hearing as Working Families Tax Credit and drew strong support from across the state.

Addressing disproportionate health outcomes by building a foundation of equity in medical training (SB 5228)

[SB 5228](#) is an important step toward addressing health inequity in health care delivery. The bill was voted out of the Senate Higher Education Committee on February 4. It has **not yet been re-referred to its next committee**. SB 5228 requires Washington's public medical schools to develop health equity curriculum for medical students and that students complete a course, or courses, on health equity prior to graduating. The objective of the health equity curriculum must be to provide tools for eliminating structural racism in healthcare systems and build cultural safety. Additionally, the bill requires that public medical schools to create a goal regarding student representation and report progress on that goal annually. Specifically, each

public medical school, by January 1, 2022, must develop a goal focused on increasing the number of underrepresented students, guided by the state of Washington's need for physicians from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds and each school's predominant equity goals. In developing the goal, special consideration may be given to students attending the UWSOM through WWAMI. The goal must be set for January 1, 2025. Progress towards each goal must be reported on an annual basis through each of their public websites.

Defining family resource center (HB 1237)

Co-sponsored with bipartisan support from Reps. Eslick, Leavitt, Senn, and others, [HB 1237](#) defines the term "family resource center" to mean a single point of entry where families, individuals, children, and youth in communities can obtain information, an assessment of needs, referral to, or direct delivery of family services in a manner that is welcoming and strength based.

The bill passed in the House in a 94-1 vote and now **heads to the Senate**. Rep. Eslick, the prime sponsor, is personally connected to the work of family resource centers after helping to advocate for and establish one in her hometown of Sultan, Washington. When Rep. Eslick came to Olympia she realized that many of her colleagues were unaware of what family resource centers were or what they did. Through working with other family resource centers, she brought together a shared definition of this important work, that can range from mental health services, child development services, and resource navigation. Family resource centers can be located in a range of locations, from apartment buildings to storefronts to churches. Other terms are sometimes used to describe the services provided by a family resource center.