

AAUW WA State Legislative Update 4/28/2021

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Week 15**

It's hard to believe that the end of the 2021 legislative session is here. On Sunday, April 25 the regular 2021 session will come to an end. If lawmakers have completed their work, they will sine die – meaning they will formally end the work of session. In the coming days legislators will finalize the 2021-23 biennial budget and make final decisions on bills that have not reached final passage yet.

Urgent action is needed on one of AAUW's top legislative priorities: ESSB 5096. The bill only has a few days left to reach final passage and it is critical that State Senators are hearing supportive messages from advocates right now.

- **Send an email:** Take action here with Balance Our Tax Code, the state's revenue coalition, and urge Senators to get ESSB 5096 to the finish line before Sunday's deadline: <https://balanceourtaxcode.com/take-action/>.
- **Make a call:** You can also call your State Senator by dialing the legislative hotline at 1-800-562-600 and asking to speak to your Senator's office. Make sure that they know you are a constituent and that you support ESSB 5096!

In the past few weeks, many of AAUW's legislative priorities have reached final passage and been signed into law. Read below to see where AAUW's remaining legislative priorities stand.

Updates on AAUW's Legislative Priorities

Tax on extraordinary wealth from capital gains ([SB 5096](#))

Senate Bill 5096 was voted out of the House, as amended in the House Finance Committee, in a historic vote on April 21st. However, the Senate refused to concur on the bill and it now heads to conference. Legislators only have a few days to find agreement and send ESSB 5096 to the Governor's desk. It will come down to the wire. This bill would put a new 7% tax on extraordinary wealth from capital gains. The first \$250,000 a year in capital gains would be exempt as would all real estate transactions. Per an amendment adopted in the House, all revenues from the tax would be allocated to the Education Legacy Trust Account to fund child care and early learning.

Working Families Tax Credit ([HB 1297](#))

Victory! The Working Families Tax Credit was passed out of the State Senate and has been concurred on in the House. It is now on its way to Governor Inslee for signature!

The final bill was amended in the Senate to change the benefit structure of the program. The amendment sets the minimum benefit at \$300 for workers without children and a maximum benefit of \$1,200 for workers with three or more children. Workers who qualify for the federal Earned Income Tax Credit will be covered by the new program. The benefit will 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 ([HB 1213](#)/[SB 5237](#))

Victory! The House and Senate have both adopted the conference committee report for SB 5237, meaning the bill has reached final passage and now heads to Governor Inslee's desk!

The Fair Start for Kids Act will require historic, new investments in early learning. 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 legislation 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 and rates
- Expansion of a statewide mental health consultation program

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

Victory again! HB 1073 was signed into law by Governor Inslee on April 21st! The Senate has concurred on the amendments to SB 5097 and it will now head to Governor Inslee's desk too.

HB 1073, which passed in a 29-29 vote in the Senate, addresses employees whose work hours were reduced due to COVID-19 and are no longer able to meet the 820 hours worked requirement to qualify for paid family and medical leave. SB 5097, which passed in a 55-42 vote in the House, expands the definition of family member for family leave to include chosen family – a critical change to ensure the leave is equitably accessible for LGBTQ+ and BIPOC communities.

Protecting Pregnant Patients Act ([SB 5140](#))

The wins keep coming. The Senate concurred on SB 5140 on April 20th and the bill now heads to Governor Inslee for signature! The Protecting Patient Care Act passed the House in a 57-41 vote on March 24th. 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.

Abortion Coverage in Student Health Plans ([HB 1009](#))

HB 1009 was signed into law by Governor Inslee on April 16th! It will go into effect 90 days after the regular session adjourns. This legislation 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](#))

SB 5177 was delivered to the Governor for signature on April 20th and now awaits his signature. 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.

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

The Senate concurred on the House amendments to SB 5183 and it is now on its way to the Governor’s office. 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. It passed the Senate unanimously.

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

SB 5068 was signed into law by Governor Inslee on April 16th! 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. 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). 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. The new federal COVID relief package (the American Relief Plan Act) includes a five-year option for states to elect to extend postpartum coverage. Starting in April 2022 states will be able to receive federal matching funds at the standard match rate.

Keep Our Care Act ([SB 5335](#))

This bill was proposed to address the rapid series of hospital mergers across the state that could threaten access to reproductive, end-of-life, and gender-affirming health care. **The bill will not advance this session.** Advocates plan on working on the issue over the interim and coming back in 2022 with legislation to address this important issue.