

STATE REPRESENTATIVE  
**MARY LOU DICKERSON**  
36<sup>TH</sup> DISTRICT



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- Health & Human Services  
Appropriations, Chair
- Early Learning & Human Services
- Ways & Means

## 2012 Legislative Session Report

Spring 2012

Dear Friends,

I can hardly believe this is my last newsletter to you. After 18 years of representing our 36<sup>th</sup> District in the Legislature, I'll be retiring when my term ends in January.

Of course, I'll still be your representative until January 14, and my office above the brand new Starbucks at the corner of NW Market Street and 22<sup>nd</sup> Avenue NW will remain open. So please don't hesitate to phone, write, email or visit. No part of my job is more important than listening and responding to the people I serve.

In addition to expressing my concerns about initiatives and the current political climate, this newsletter describes legislation I worked on this year. You'll see discussions of child-abuse reporting, cannabis, and new laws to combat child prostitution. You'll also see that the last bill I passed as your representative comes full circle to where I started, by trying to improve the lives of Washington's children.

Please let me take this opportunity to thank you for the honor and pleasure of serving the best legislative district in Washington. It's been quite a ride. And now I'm looking forward to coming home full time to my family and friends and the community I love best.

With a grateful heart,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mary Lou Dickerson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mary Lou

# STATE REPRESENTATIVE MARY LOU DICKERSON

## BEWARE OF BAD INITIATIVES



If Washington was like our 36<sup>th</sup> District, we would have avoided the worst of the tragic budget reductions that have hurt our schools, colleges and safety-net services since 2008. People with severe mental illness and other disabilities would be getting more help to survive. Tens of thousands of working people would still have Basic Health Plan insurance coverage.

More low-income toddlers would have quality pre-school education.

We'd be better off in many ways if Washington had followed our lead and rejected simple-minded anti-tax initiatives.

Unfortunately, most of Washington voted for Tim Eyman's I-1053 and for repealing modest soda pop and candy taxes that were passed to help solve the budget emergency (I-1083). These initiatives handcuffed state leaders just as Washington faced the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression.

As a sponsor of a current initiative (I-502), I obviously respect the public's right to shape government through initiatives and referenda. But we must beware of threats to the process.

Beware of big money buying ballots. Giant beverage companies spent \$16 million to repeal the soda pop and candy taxes, outspending opponents 39 to 1. The next year, Costco spent \$22.5 million to privatize state liquor sales (I-1183). However you felt about that initiative, direct democracy is in trouble when a single corporation can spend over \$18.00 for every "yes" vote on a ballot question.

Beware of initiatives that promise something for nothing. It's easy to sell initiatives (even in our 36<sup>th</sup> District) when you can tout fantastic benefits and claim legislators will magically find a painless way to pay for them. Glitzy campaigns persuaded the public to pass initiatives that promised huge tax cuts (e.g. I-695) and huge spending increases for smaller class sizes (I-728), better-paid teachers (I-732) and better long-term care (I-1163)—with not a penny to pay for these promises. These enormous unfunded mandates helped fuel the budget crisis.

It's heartbreaking to see the devastating consequences of cutting more than \$10 billion from the state budget since 2008. Our safety net is in tatters. Our schools have suffered. Soaring tuition is driving students from college. And the poor and homeless have suffered the most. The fiscal impacts of recent initiatives made it harder to solve these problems.

This is the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Washington's initiative process. It's a good time to ask what we can do as individuals to make the process work as intended. I think the answer starts with taking the time to become informed, and voting with our hearts and minds, and not with our emotions alone.

I will be starting a non-partisan organization that will focus on this very issue. So although I'll be leaving office, you'll still see me working for the well-being of our great state.

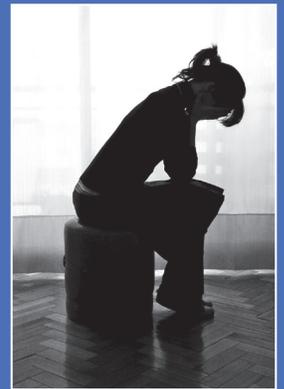
Mary Lou

## CHILD-ABUSE REPORTING

Could it happen here? Could college coaches in Washington get away with endangering children by sweeping suspected child sex abuse under the rug? I've heard that question many times since the sickening Penn State sex-abuse scandal broke last year. The answer was yes – but not anymore.

Gov. Gregoire recently signed a new law, sponsored by Sen. Kohl-Welles, that *requires* coaches and many other college employees to report suspected child abuse and neglect. I fought to pass this law in the House. However, I still feel very strongly that we should do more to protect kids: We should require *every* adult to report serious and obvious cases of child abuse or neglect.

Too many abused children are suffering and dying behind shrouds of silence as Washington adds one profession at a time to our mandatory reporting laws. Just recently, a pastor's silence allowed a serial sex-abuser to



victimize additional children in King County. In another case, a young adopted girl died of exposure and malnutrition in Skagit County, even though a neighbor suspected, but did not report, that the child was being systematically starved and beaten.

My bill (HB 2331) to require universal mandatory reporting of *severe and obvious* child abuse and neglect passed the House, but died in the Senate. I'm glad we made incremental progress this year by passing a bill concerning college employees, but I hope Washington will soon join the 18 states that require *all* adults to report suspicions of serious child abuse. After all, everyone has a moral duty to report child abuse. It should be a legal duty, too.

# 2012 LEGISLATIVE SESSION REPORT

## STOPPING CHILD PROSTITUTION



Hundreds of children are being sold into prostitution in Seattle, including girls as young as 13. Stopping these crimes is a personal priority. I wrote the 2011 law (HB 1874) that gave police more investigative tools to catch pimps and protect kids—including more authority to record incriminating conversations. New 2012 laws will make life even harder for criminals who prostitute children.

We sided with Seattle police and made it a felony to knowingly sell or distribute sex ads that depict children. Police say these ads are driving alarming increases in child prostitution locally, and it's outrageous for anyone to pretend their freedom of speech includes advertising children for sex. (SB 6251)

We also targeted sex-trade profits by strengthening the ability of law enforcement to seize profits and assets traceable to child prostitution (SB 6252).

Another new law I co-sponsored imposes a ten-fold increase in civil fines for patronizing prostitutes—from \$150 to \$1,500—with proceeds dedicated to combating prostitution. First-time offenders will also have to attend “John schools” (SB 2692).

These and other new laws will help to reduce child prostitution, but there is still more to do. Sex crimes against children won't stop until we make them stop, and that should be a personal priority for all of us.



*Mary Lou with granddaughter, Audrey, on Children's Day.*

## CANNABIS: TAXATION AND REGULATION OR PROHIBITION?

I proposed legalizing, regulating and taxing cannabis last year to start a public conversation about alternatives to the staggering costs of the failed war on cannabis users.



*Rep. Dickerson speaking at a cannabis press conference.*

What a conversation! Leading prosecutors and the *Seattle Times* made international headlines by supporting my bill (HB 1550), and the issue of prohibition vs. taxation and regulation was discussed seriously in legislative hearings for the first time.

When the 2011 session ended, I became a sponsor of Initiative 502, which asked the Legislature to adopt a policy of cannabis regulation and taxation. More than 340,000 citizens signed I-502! However, the Legislature did not act on the initiative, so it will be on the November ballot.

A new, official state analysis of I-502 estimates its taxes on cannabis could raise at least \$560 million in new revenues each year. I'm sure that will be part of the discussion going forward. However you feel about cannabis, I hope you'll take part in the conversation. *Everyone* has a stake in the outcome.

# STATE REPRESENTATIVE MARY LOU DICKERSON

## BEST PRACTICES FOR GETTING THE BEST RESULTS



Rep. Dickerson discussing a bill with Rep. Kagi

I'm prouder than words can say that lawmakers unanimously passed what may be the most important bill of my career on the very last day of my last regular session as your representative. The new law will greatly improve services for children.

One clear lesson of my past work on children's services, juvenile justice and adult criminal-justice reforms is that we get the best results when we use best practices that are *proven* to be cost-effective. This strategy works! Evidence-based best practices helped us cut Washington's crime rate by 24 percent between 2005 and 2010. If you compare this amazing success with national trends, it translates into about 84,000 fewer crimes in Washington and \$300 million in annual criminal-justice savings.

But we can do even better. Too many children's services are still based on old habits and wishful thinking. My reform (HB 2536) will

change that by *requiring* agencies that serve children to substantially increase their use of evidence-based best practices over the next seven years. The reform also requires improved training, accountability, cultural competency and coordination of services.

Child-welfare experts say HB 2536 ranks with the most progressive evidence-based reforms of children's services in the entire nation. I'm proud my last bill is for the children of Washington.

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