

# 2014 LEGISLATIVE SESSION REPORT

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## STATE REPRESENTATIVE TINA ORWALL 33<sup>RD</sup> DISTRICT



May 2014

Dear Neighbors,

Thank you for the honor of serving in Olympia on behalf of our community. I am pleased we ended the short session on time and that I was able to preside as Deputy Speaker Pro Tempore in the final gavel of the 2014 session. This newsletter provides some brief updates of the session that I hope you find informative.

I am happy to report that the Legislature passed four of my bills and they have all been signed into law by Governor Inslee:

**HB 2315** – Suicide prevention training for health care professionals

**HB 2164** – Evidence-based programs for juveniles adjudicated of unlawful possession of a firearm.

**HB 2171** – Stronger economic protections for veterans and military personnel.

**HB 1292** – Support for victims of the sex trade so they can start their lives over by vacating their criminal records.

While this was overall a hard session, in the end we came to an agreement and passed a **responsible budget** that protects the most vulnerable among us. The final budget contains a \$33 million investment for mental health beds and services at the community level; 5,000 new slots for services to our developmentally disabled community, taking a big bite out of the wait list; and increased protections for military servicemen and women along with their families. We also make some modest investments in education including \$58 million for K-12 supplies, books and technology.

However, there were some disappointments. Unfortunately, the legislature did not pass a transportation package, which is critical to our area for the movement of people and goods. We also did not pass a Capital budget, which is important to local infrastructure and job creation in our district. The House did pass these budgets but they did not make it through the Senate.

We also need to make large investments toward our obligation to fully fund schools; you'll find a comprehensive section on this topic inside this newsletter. I welcome any feedback you may have on how to solve this critical matter of fully funding our schools.

As always, don't hesitate to contact me with your feedback, or if you need more information on anything discussed in this report.

## GIVING EVERYONE A CHANCE AT COLLEGE

There's good news on the higher education front. The state budget froze college tuition for the second year in a row, after constant increases during the recession.

Also, the legislature finally approved with strong bipartisan support the **Dream Act**, long sought here in Washington (and already on the books in many other states), which levels the playing field to give all hardworking young people who qualify for college a chance to apply for financial aid.



# STATE REPRESENTATIVE TINA ORWALL

## WHERE WE STAND ON MCCLEARY

Our constitution says that providing education to all Washington children is the state's paramount duty. The Supreme Court stated we are not fulfilling our responsibility and, in its McCleary decision, mandated a significant boost in K-12 school investments toward fully funding basic education by 2018. We're talking about at least \$5 billion in additional funding in the next budget.

Do we need to invest more in schools? In 1992 Washington ranked 24<sup>th</sup> in class sizes, and the most recent tally puts our state at 47<sup>th</sup> out of the 50 states. This means Washington's average student-to-teacher ratio is the fourth highest in the nation.

In looking for ways to provide our kids with the necessary tools to succeed in the global economy, we came up with some creative solutions but it was difficult to reach consensus. The House proposed closing tax loopholes for huge oil companies to funnel more funds toward education. Another idea was to sell \$700 million in lottery-backed bonds for classroom construction, and another option was to sell \$825 million in general-obligation bonds to modernize STEM facilities, fund all-day kindergarten and reduce K-3 class sizes. These and other projects to help us comply with the Supreme Court's ruling were not able to pass out of the Senate.

The House also proposed closing some tax loopholes in order to fund the reinstatement of the Initiative 732 Cost of Living Adjustment for teachers and other school employees. We were not able to reach an agreement with the Senate on teacher COLAs, but we'll be back next session with this issue as a top priority for House Democrats.



## SAVING LIVES

From 2002 to 2012 the number of deaths by suicide in Washington state increased by almost 28 percent, making Washington's suicide rate 15 percent higher than the national average. I've worked with professionals and survivors to address this alarming trend through legislation. Last year we passed **HB 1336** to improve the capacity of schools to identify and intervene with students struggling with suicidal thoughts.

In 2012 the Legislature passed my legislation, **HB 2366**, known as the Matt Adler Suicide, Treatment and Management Act, which required a broad range of health care providers, who may come into contact with individuals contemplating suicide, to obtain six hours of suicide prevention training every six years. This year I sponsored **HB 2315** to expand the list of professionals to include



medical providers such as physicians and nurses. Instead of every six years, this year's measure requires these health care professionals to go through a one-time 6-hour suicide-prevention training course. Washington is the first state in the nation to pass legislation of this nature.

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 Printed on recycled paper

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PRSR STD  
US POSTAGE  
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SEATTLE, WA  
PERMIT NO. 1885



## SUPPORTING OUR VETERANS

With approximately 640,000 veteran residents, Washington state has the 12th largest veteran population in the United States. When combined with the over 62,000 active duty military personnel and members of the National Guard and Reserve, veterans and military personnel account for more than 10 percent of Washington's total population.

Yet protections under Washington state law for military servicemembers called to active duty are less than those provided under federal law. This inequality means that servicemembers whose active duty orders are signed by the governor have fewer rights than those whose active duty orders are signed by the president. Some of the protections provided in the Federal Servicemembers Civil Relief Act (SCRA) include reduced interest rates on preexisting debts, foreclosure and eviction protections, and protections from default judgments.



As co-chair of the Joint Legislative Committee on Veterans and Military Affairs, I believe that when our servicemembers are protecting us, it is only right that we protect their families and the lives they have left behind. So this session, working closely with Governor Inslee and Attorney General Ferguson, I sponsored **HB 2171**, which incorporates existing federal protections into state laws. This legislation helps us ensure all military personnel can carry out their jobs without having to worry about their families' wellbeing during their tour of duty.

This session we also passed a bill for public colleges and universities to credit military training courses or programs, and another measure granting residency status to veterans and active military for in-state tuition purposes.