

Rep. Ruth Kagi

2014

P.O. Box 40600  
Olympia, WA 98504-0600

LEGISLATIVE WRAP-UP

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Town Hall Meeting:

Date/Time: May 28th, 6:15–7:30.

Location: Lynnwood Library, 19200 44th Ave W, Lynnwood

GOALS FOR NEXT SESSION:

This was the "short session" – only sixty days is not much time to get major legislation passed. There were definitely disappointments this session. This means we have lots of tough work to do next session. I look forward to tackling these issues next year:

- **Education Funding** – The State Supreme Court, in the McCleary decision, told the legislature that it is not living up to its "paramount duty" to "amply fund" our basic education system. Our students deserve a quality education. Our hard-working teachers deserve a cost-of-living increase. We need to invest more than \$2 billion into our education system in the next two years. We also need to fund quality early childhood education to get children ready to succeed in school. Our current tax system will not generate sufficient revenue to meet this need. We will need serious revenue reform in the coming years. Our children are counting on us.
- **Transportation Package** – We were not able to pass a comprehensive transportation revenue package. There are philosophical differences between the transportation priorities of the House Democrats and the Senate Republicans. I am willing to compromise, we need a transportation package that invests in transit, rail, and bike and pedestrian paths, not just roads. Having a diverse transportation system ensures our economy can move goods and services efficiently, and we can all get where we need to go.

- **Revenue Reform** – We have been taking a serious look at our state's tax preferences to see if they are working. Are tax exemptions bringing in a return on the investment? Or, are they ineffective? There are tax loopholes that, at one time, were effective, but that no longer bring in a good return on investment. House and Senate Democrats proposed closing several ineffective tax loopholes and putting the money towards education. Unfortunately, due to opposition in the Senate, these proposals did not pass.

I truly appreciate the tremendous privilege of representing you in the legislature, and thank you for giving me the opportunity to serve you in the 32nd legislative district. I look forward to each and every legislative session to make a difference for the children and families in this district and across the state. As you can see, there were a lot of positive changes we were able to make this legislative session. We clearly have lots of work to do next session. I look forward to these challenges.

Please stay in touch with me; I appreciate hearing your questions, comments and concerns. Thank you!



Representative Ruth Kagi

Keeping in touch

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- Committees:**
- Early Learning and Human Services (Chair)
  - Appropriations
  - Appropriations Subcommittee on Health and Human Services
  - Environment



32nd Legislative District

2014 Legislative Wrap-up

INTRODUCTION

The 2014 legislative session has concluded. And, I am proud to say that in spite of a difficult political climate, my colleagues and I worked together to agree on a supplemental budget, pass important bills and adjourn on time. I believe it was a productive and positive session. Although we did not address some major issues, there were many accomplishments:

- **The Dream Act** - If youth work hard in school, they should be able to apply for college scholarships, no matter where they were born. After many efforts over the past five years, the legislature passed the Dream Act. This bill ensures that dreamers, young people who are brought to this country by their parents as children, are able to apply for financial aid for college.
- **Mental Health Funding** – Our state does not have the tools, the facilities or the resources we need to properly treat those with mental health issues. As a last resort, many hospitals practice "boarding" (keeping patients locked up in emergency rooms) because they have no other option. This is wrong and inhumane. This session, we made major progress by investing an **additional \$32.5 million for both adults and children's mental health systems**. These funds will help our state transform the way we treat those with mental health challenges.
- **K-12 Investment** – We have a long road to travel to fully fund our K-12 education system. This session, we were able to put an **additional \$58 million** into supplies, technology and operating costs for Washington's children, and an **additional \$2 million** towards helping new teachers. Unfortunately, we were not able to fund a COLA for teachers.

Our budget falls far short of what is needed to comply with the McCleary decision to fully fund K-12, the Senate would not close tax exemptions or raise revenue- steps that will be required in order to fully fund McCleary.

Toll Free Legislative Hotline:  
1-800-562-6000

Hearing Impaired Hotline:  
1-800-635-9993





## AT-RISK CHILDREN

### Youth Opportunity

Picture Ben, a 15 year old hanging out with friends late at night. Ben's friends want him to "borrow" his neighbor's car to take them all for a joy ride. In a momentary lapse of judgment, he caves to peer pressure. And gets caught. Ben faces the court and juvenile detention. He makes amends for his crime and understands the gravity of his mistakes. Ben pays his debt to society and is ready to move forward with a fresh start. Ben can't. He can't get a job. He can't rent an apartment. He can't get a scholarship for college. Ben's juvenile record is robbing him of a future. Because, up until only a few weeks ago, Washington was one of 8 states with open records.

My biggest accomplishment this session was passage of the Youth Opportunity Act -- a bill that corrects this wrong, and allows juvenile records to be sealed when a youth turns 18. The bill, which does not apply to serious violent offenses, sex offenses and felony drug offenses, will provide 6,000-10,000 youth each year the opportunity to put their youthful mistakes behind them and move forward to get an education, a job and housing. It has

taken many years to get this bill passed and rectify a real injustice in our current system. This bill will provide a path to success for many of our youth who have turned their lives around.

### Foster Care

Foster youth are some of the most vulnerable people in our state. They have lower rates of high school graduation, lower test scores and higher rates of homelessness than any other segment of our youth.

All children deserve an opportunity to succeed. Imagine having to leave your home at age 18 with a garbage bag full of belongings. No help, no support. This is still the reality for some foster children in Washington. Thankfully, we have made much progress over the last several years helping foster youth, who age out of care at age 18, transition into adulthood. Sadly there are still too many foster youth who, because of restrictions in the law, are not able to take advantage of extended support. This session helped fix some of those restrictions. We expanded extended foster care to youth who work part time and are unable to fully support themselves. The changes we've made will continue to reduce the high rate of homelessness among foster youth aging out of care, and help them successfully transition to adulthood.

A separate issue for foster children is the lack of legal assistance. Washington ranks 47th in the nation in the legal support we give to foster children. In the courtroom, the foster child, whose future is at stake, is often the only one who doesn't have an attorney.

This session we passed a bill providing foster children who are "legally free" with attorneys. Research in other states shows that foster children who have attorneys are able to be placed with good families much sooner than those without. This safety and stability is best for our children, and it saves the taxpayer dollars

## HELPING FAMILIES SUCCEED

### A hand-up for struggling parents

So many working parents in our state struggle to make ends meet. These last few years have been particularly difficult for low-income families in our community. This session, for the first time in many years, we were able to invest new funding into our Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. TANF helps parents address barriers to employment, and get the skills they need get out of poverty and succeed.

We know the best place for children is with family. Some parents are unable to care for their children who are removed from their home. Many are lucky enough to have grandparents who want to step in and care for them. As we all know, raising a child is expensive. Some grandparents cannot afford to care for their grandchildren. Recognizing this, the Legislature also passed a bill giving financial support for more grandparents who are their grandchildren's primary caregivers.



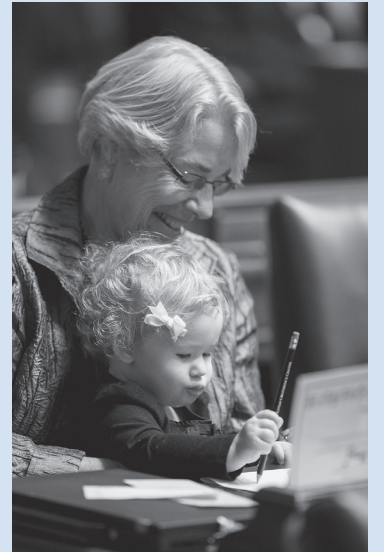
## PROTECTING OUR COMMUNITY

### Keeping infants and children safe

You may have seen in the news last year the tragic death of Baby Eve Uphold. She died at a licensed, in-home daycare due to unsafe sleep practices. What made this tragedy even worse was that a decade earlier, another baby, Graham Hazzard, also died there from unsafe sleep practices.

One of the hardest decisions we can make as parents is where to place our children in childcare. We do our best to ensure the provider we pick will provide our children with safe, secure care. Both sets of parents had done the research and chosen this licensed facility, believing their children would be safe there.

Clearly, current state licensing and practice needs to be strengthened. That is why I sponsored a bill this session to require a thorough outside review process if there is a death at a licensed childcare or early learning center. The rigorous review process would include outside experts, and would determine if systemic changes in law or practice are needed to prevent other tragedies. Unfortunately, this bill did not pass the Senate. I plan to convene a group next month to review safe sleep practices and our licensing requirements, and will reintroduce the bill next session.



### No family should be homeless

Every child should have a place to call home. I was very relieved this session that we were able to pass a bill extending the document recording fee which is a critical lifeline for organizations trying to help families at risk of homelessness. The money goes directly to housing support: temporary housing, rental vouchers and shelters. Failing to pass this extension would have put more families at risk of homelessness.

### Closing the gap for Washingtonians with developmental disabilities

One of the biggest wins this session was legislation that will increase funding for services for developmentally disabled children and families. There are over 15,000 individuals and families with children with developmental disabilities who are on a waiting list for services. Many parents who have children with severe disabilities need 24/7 care. These parents never get a break. They have been determined eligible for assistance, due to lack of funding, have been unable to get help.

This session we passed two bills that will provide critically needed services to about 5,000 families. These bills will enable us to access new federal funding, providing support to these families who have been waiting, many for years.

### Gun Safety and protecting victims of domestic violence

It is frightening when a domestic violence offender makes death threats against his victim, and the victim knows the offender has guns. Forty percent of women in this country who are murdered are killed by an intimate partner. And, more than half the time, the hands doing the killing were holding a gun. In a domestic violence situation, the violence often peaks when the victim leaves the offender, and again when she takes out a protection order.

This session, we passed a law to keep guns out of the hands of domestic violence offenders while there is a protection order out against them. Once the protection order is lifted or the offender is acquitted, the firearms are returned. This law brings state law into line with federal law. This law will save lives.

