



STATE REPRESENTATIVE TINA ORWALL

Legislative Report to the 33rd District

Spring 2016

Dear Neighbor,

It's an incredible honor to serve our community in Olympia and work on issues that impact our district. We recently finished special session and I am glad to be back home to continue working on the issues that matter to you.

I want to share with you some of my bills that I'm most proud were signed into law. This year we took important steps on rape kit reform by being the first state in the nation to implement a statewide tracking system. We also forged groundbreaking partnerships between suicide prevention organizations, loss survivors and gun rights advocates to prevent the loss of precious lives. I'm continuing to work on tackling student loan debt, supporting our students with special needs, and expanding apprenticeships to create more pathways to employment.

This newsletter highlights some other important steps taken this session, including addressing the teacher shortage crisis, closing the opportunity gap, reducing truancy, and investing in mental health services, foster kids, and homeless youth.

It's so important for me to hear from you and I appreciate all of your letters, emails, and calls. Please stay in touch. I'm always available to meet for coffee.

Thank you again for allowing me to represent you in Olympia. By working together, we can strengthen our community and ensure opportunities for all.

Sincerely,

HERE'S HOW TO REACH ME

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STATE REPRESENTATIVE TINA ORWALL



EDUCATION

Funding our schools

By investing \$4.2 billion new dollars into K-12 since 2013, Washington has made progress toward fully funding our public schools. But there's still work to do. This session we pushed forward on a plan to end our reliance on local levies by adopting a solution

to the final piece of the education funding challenge by 2017. We passed the Education Funding Task Force ([SB 6195/HB 2366](#)), which will report back to the Legislature with recommendations including reliance on local levies and teacher compensation.

Closing the Opportunity Gap

Every student deserves a quality education and path to be successful. The bill we passed this year is an important step forward in addressing educational inequities. The legislation, [HB 1541](#), which is based on the work by the [Educational Opportunity Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee](#), includes critical changes to school discipline policies, cultural competence training for school staff, bilingual education endorsement requirements, detailed racial and ethnic data, stronger transitions from early learning to kindergarten, and supports for students and families.

Keeping Kids in School

We know that one of the top predictors of whether a student will graduate from high school is their attendance in elementary school—and that any absences, excused or unexcused, have an impact. Under our current law, Washington state sends more students to detention for truancy issues than any other state in the nation. I sponsored [HB 2449](#) to provide supports to students and families. This measure builds on best practices such as Community Truancy Boards to divert students from court, and expand beds for homeless youth to help keep kids in school and achieve academic success. A portion of the funding was vetoed in the bill but the policy will move forward and we will come back next session to make the needed investments.



Sexual abuse in school plans

My earlier legislation required schools in Washington to have plans to recognize, screen, and respond to emotional or behavioral distress in students. But the plans only include indicators of possible substance abuse, violence, and youth suicide. To have better tools in place to identify and respond to possible sexual abuse, I sponsored [HB 2597](#), which strengthens child and family protections by adding sexual abuse to school plans. Under this new law, the plans must include parental notification requirements, and information regarding how staff should respond when allegations of sexual contact or abuse are made.

Addressing the teacher shortage crisis

Low pay and high turnover make it hard for school districts to hire enough qualified teachers. We passed [SB 6455](#), which attracts qualified teachers by providing financial incentives, streamlining certification for out of state teachers, expanding the ability of retired teachers to become substitutes, mentoring for new teachers, and expanding alternative routes to the teaching profession.

Homeless students

Over 35,000 kids in our public schools are currently homeless. This is a tragedy that demands action. We passed [HB 1682](#) to improve education outcomes for homeless students through increased in-school guidance supports, housing stability and identification services.

Funding for Puget Sound Skills Center

We're very proud that the state has provided over 19 million dollars in funding to rebuild the Puget Sound Skills Center, which provides eighteen career paths for students who participate.

LEGISLATIVE REPORT TO THE 33RD DISTRICT

SUPPORTING FAMILIES

Suicide Prevention Awareness and Safer Homes

Sadly, Washington state has a higher rate of suicide than the national average. We lose two youth every week in our state. Of the 1,111 lives lost to suicide in 2014, 23 percent were men and women who served our country. And of the nearly 34,000 gun-related deaths in America, 80 percent are suicides. Over the last several years, I'm proud to have sponsored bills that are first in the nation to require training for mental health and medical professionals on suicide awareness and prevention. This year, we formed a new partnership with the NRA, Second Amendment Foundation, Alliance for Gun Responsibility, pharmacies, mental health professionals, veterans groups and survivors to raise public awareness on suicide prevention. Together, these groups will help us create a public awareness campaign, develop trainings on suicide awareness, and increase advocacy efforts and trainings on suicide awareness and prevention education. I hope that by working together, we can begin to heal the issues that divide us and save precious lives.



Helping Veterans

Currently, veterans have to look to three different definitions of "veteran" and "family" for the Veterans' Assistance Fund eligibility. To correct this issue, I sponsored [HB 1213](#), which streamlines the definitions to be more consistent with those in federal law. This way, the County Veterans Assistance Programs can actually access a wider array of services and do it more quickly. It is another way to help the men and women who serve our country.

Right-sizing the Foreclosure Fairness Act

A few years ago I spearheaded passage of the Foreclosure Fairness Act (FFA) to help homeowners and lenders explore possible alternatives to foreclosure and reach a resolution whenever possible. This session, I sponsored [HB 2876](#) to specifically address the foreclosure of deeds of trust. As foreclosure rates have now returned to pre-recession levels, this new law right sizes the FFA. Services, including counseling and mediation, remain available and financially viable.

Mental health services for children and youth

All kids deserve a strong developmental foundation; for some, this requires extra support and services. We passed [HB 2439](#), which establishes the Children's Mental Health Work Group tasked with identifying ways to increase access to mental health services for children and families. By reaching children and their families early on, we can make a difference in the overall mental health picture for our state.

Protecting our children from toxic chemicals

The Toxic Free Kids and Family Act ([HB 2545](#)) allows the Department of Health to restrict the use of toxic flame retardant chemicals in children's products. We know that exposure to these toxic flame retardants can have devastating health consequences – cancer, ADD/ADHD, learning deficits and infertility. This change will provide safety and peace of mind for Washington families.




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LEGISLATIVE REPORT TO THE 33RD DISTRICT

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STATE REPRESENTATIVE **TINA ORWALL**

KEEPING OUR COMMUNITY SAFE

Testing and tracking every rape kit

Thousands of rape kits are untested in Washington. Last year I led the way in the passage of a law requiring that every rape kit be submitted for lab testing within 30 days of collection. Testing every rape kit makes our communities safer by helping law enforcement catch serial rapists, holding assailants accountable, and offering long-awaited justice for the victims of these crimes. This session, I sponsored [HB 2530](#), which will establish the first statewide sexual assault kit tracking system in the nation. It will enable law enforcement to track every rape kit, which will help with their criminal investigations. It will also allow victims to anonymously track and receive updates on the status of their kits.

These are important steps. We recognize we have more work ahead and are committed to advocating for women and children in our state. Some issues we will continue to work on for next session include equal pay and pregnancy accommodations in the workplace.

I look forward to hearing from you on other issues you'd like to see addressed in Olympia.



Deputy Speaker Pro-Tempore
Tina Orwall presiding over
the House floor.