



# Washington State Legislative Report to the 38th District

Fall 2017



Friends and neighbors,

During the 2017 legislative session, we successfully advocated for policies and a budget that makes children and families a priority. While it wasn't everything we wanted, we are proud of the major accomplishments, including passing the Paid Family and Medical Leave Act and significantly increasing education funding, which puts us on a path to giving every student an equal opportunity to learn and succeed.

Even though we made a historic investment in K-12, and we were able to do so without accepting some of the more draconian cuts that Senate Republicans proposed to programs that help our communities, our work is not done. Like so many big issues that our state faces, solutions are an ongoing process.

Our budget still falls short on meeting all of the demands of the state and we need to keep working on finding sustainable, fair revenue to support our state. And, because the Senate Republicans blocked passage of a Capital Budget, there are many questions that need to be resolved around how to achieve class-size reductions when no new classrooms are being built.


## HIGHLIGHTS OF OUR FAMILIES FIRST BUDGET:

- **New dollars that get us back on the right track toward fully funding education**, which keeps our promise to 1.1 million schoolchildren by investing in teacher salaries, professional development, paraeducators, class size reductions, learning assistance, special education, bilingual instruction, and low performing schools.
- **Expand early childhood education** slots for low-income families across the state.
- **Boost in funding for the State Need Grant** so students can get the financial aid they need to pursue their dreams.
- **More funding in mental health, public health**, and acceptance of federal Medicaid funding to fight the opioid crisis, reduce homelessness rates, and integrate physical and behavioral health.
- **Providing high-quality care** to our aging population and people with disabilities.
- **Increased funding for assistance programs** to keep youth and families off the streets and for state food and temporary assistance to families in need.
- **Paying state workers a fair wage**, so we can compete for a high-quality workforce that serves the public.

It took until the very end of the fiscal year to come to an agreement with the Republican-controlled Senate on our budget, and getting to an agreement does not come without compromise. Democrats successfully fought against cuts proposed by Senate Republicans to essential services and programs that help our families and keep our state moving forward.

Unfortunately, the progressive revenue tax options we fought for were repeatedly rejected by Republicans. Republicans insisted on increasing property taxes. While House Democrats were able to get to an agreement with a much smaller property tax increase than the one proposed by the Republicans, the compromise does include a property tax increase.



  
Senator  
John McCoy

  
Representative  
June Robinson

  
Representative  
Mike Sells

## Strengthening the Middle Class



A robust middle class is vital for our state to remain prosperous, so we're continuously working on policies to strengthen our workforce and creating greater opportunities for progress and fair reward for effort. This nation was built on the belief that if you work hard, you can deliver a better future for your family.

That's what the middle class is about—it's what makes Washington strong. And it's why we keep fighting for an economy that works for everyone, not just the wealthy few.

This session we led the charge on several bills to help working families, support business growth and protect the middle class. Four of them made it all the way to the governor's desk:

- **Supporting Washington working families with paid family and medical leave** (SB 5975) so workers don't struggle to take time off when they are sick, serious illness strikes a member of their family, or they need to care for a new baby.
- **Supporting women by requiring employers to grant reasonable accommodations in the workplace** for pregnancy and pregnancy-related health conditions (SB 5835), because women should not have to choose between being able to earn a living and having a healthy pregnancy.

- **Making it easier to operate small businesses in Washington** by removing unnecessary red tape and simplifying the business license process (HB 2005).
- Finally, after five years of repeatedly bringing this issue up, we made a number of reforms to **ensure safer equipment, safer drivers and adequate insurance for railroad workers** (HB 1105).
- **Giving people a better chance to finish their vocational degrees and get into stable, good-paying jobs** (HB 1566 / SB 5347).

Many good bills that passed out of the House and would have greatly helped working families didn't receive the support of the Republican-led Senate, including:

- **Updating the Equal Pay Opportunity Act** (HB 1506) by prohibiting pay secrecy policies, allowing discussion of wages, and banning retaliation against workers who ask for equal pay and opportunities. Because gender should not define a person's worth and value.
- **Helping job seekers with arrest or conviction records find work and turn their lives around** (HB 1298) by keeping employers from asking them about their criminal convictions until after workers are deemed qualified for the positions.
- **Improving working conditions for nurses** (HB 1715) by ensuring they get adequate and uninterrupted breaks and are not required to work overtime on a regular basis.
- **Expanding broadband service across the state** by supporting public utilities districts (PUDs) that want to invest in fiber-optic infrastructure. More than 200,000 people still lack access to broadband in our state and far too many have only one provider to choose from. (SB 5483)

We are committed to making our state a better place for everybody, so we will continue fighting for what is right, fair and necessary to strengthen our economy by lending support to those who are driving Washington's prosperity forward, and making sure everyone has a chance for success.

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Sen. John McCoy · Rep. June Robinson · Rep. Mike Sells

## Health Care



Access to health care in our state has been advancing steadily since the passage of the Affordable Care Act. But with the threat of ACA repeal coupled with increasing needs in Washington state, there are still many improvements that we can make. These are some of the bills we passed that were signed by the governor:

- **Giving women the ease and peace of mind** of consistent access to medications by allowing them to get a year's worth of contraceptives (HB 1234) at one time instead of having to go to the pharmacy every month.
- **Addressing the shortage of dentists** (HB 1411) by allowing dental residencies in hospitals, instead of restricting them to community health clinics. And allowing dental assistants with advanced training to provide more dental services in tribal settings (SB 5079).

- **Expanding mental health care for our children** (HB 1713) by bringing more mental health services to schools and via telemedicine, along with depression screenings for new moms and teenagers.
- **Responding to the growing opioid addiction crisis** (HB 1427) by removing many barriers to treatment that have stopped people from getting the care they need.

We will continue working on many of the bills that would have made a difference to families across Washington but did not get the support of the Republican-led Senate, including:

- **Ending the practice of “surprise” billing** (HB 2114) where patients get unexpected bills months after a procedure, with hospitals and insurance providers fighting over who should pay and forcing it on the patient.
- **Addressing the needs of our aging population** by tracking the cost of prescription drugs (HB 1541) to better respond when drug costs become unaffordable.
- **Creating a statewide drug take-back program** (HB 1047) to ensure safe disposal of opioid prescription drugs.
- **Continuing to address the doctor shortage in our rural and underserved communities** by providing financial aid and new loans for doctors and others in the health care workforce.

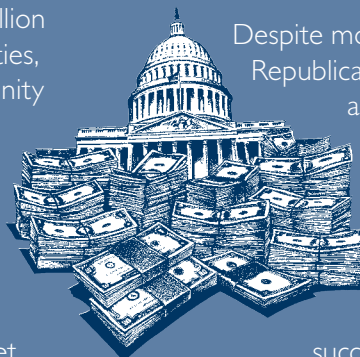
## Capital Budget

We continue to be disappointed that lawmakers left Olympia this year without a capital budget. This bipartisan budget included more than \$4 billion for school construction, mental health facilities, affordable housing, parks and other community projects.

In Everett alone, the Cocoon House for homeless youth is waiting on funding for its expansion and Everett High School is missing out on \$2 million for a new center focused on getting students prepared for high-demand healthcare careers. The budget also included \$2.76 million for the Housing Hope's HopeWorks Station and \$1 million for Marysville's Ebey Waterfront Trail.

Senate Republicans insisted on holding up the capital budget until lawmakers essentially overturned a recent state Supreme Court ruling requiring counties to

protect ground and surface water supplies before new wells are drilled.



Despite months of good-faith negotiations, Senate Republicans insisted on a 'my way or the highway' approach to this issue. GOP leaders kept pushing a bill that would 'fix' the court ruling by nullifying it. By pitting landowners who want to develop property against the reality that our natural resources are finite and that new wells can divert water from existing users, the Republicans have succeeded only in instilling unnecessary panic into a situation that requires thoughtful collaboration.

We need to find a thoughtful solution to our state's water challenges, but holding the capital budget hostage is no way to govern. We remain hopeful that cooler heads will prevail and the Legislature can pass a capital budget soon.

