

Rep. Ruth Kagi

2018

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



LEGISLATIVE WRAP-UP

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ADDRESSING GUN VIOLENCE

After the recent devastating shooting at a high school in Parkland, Florida, people across the nation are rightfully demanding more than thoughts and prayers to prevent future mass

shootings. In order to try and reduce the carnage of mass shootings, like the one in Las Vegas last October, the Washington Legislature passed **SB 5992** to ban bump fire stocks.

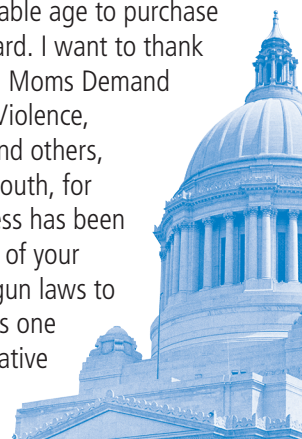
While gun violence typically comes to the forefront when there are mass shootings, the impacts of gun violence are felt daily in homes and neighborhoods everywhere. I have long been an advocate for common sense gun legislation and supported two bills this year that the legislature was able to pass to reduce some of the most common occurrences of gun violence – domestic violence and suicide.

More than one in three women in the U.S. have experienced some form of domestic abuse at some point in their life; almost half of women killed last year were killed by a family member. A person is five times more likely to be murdered if there is a firearm in the home. **SB 6298** makes it unlawful for a person convicted of domestic violence harassment to possess a firearm.

Conviction of other domestic violence crimes in our state already meant loss of the right to have firearms, but harassment wasn't included – until now.

When people are in a crisis and struggling with impulsive thoughts of suicide, having access to firearms significantly increases the risk of harm. **SB 5553** creates an important tool for a person to take a step toward safety by allowing them to voluntarily place themselves on a "no-buy" list for firearms.

My biggest disappointment this session was the Legislature's inability to pass more significant legislation on responsible gun ownership. My child access prevention bill never received a vote, and a bill to increase the allowable age to purchase assault weapons did not move forward. I want to thank the many passionate advocates from Moms Demand Action, Grandmothers Against Gun Violence, the Alliance for Gun Responsibility and others, particularly the growing number of youth, for speaking up and showing up. Progress has been slow, but the tide is turning because of your insistence that we pass responsible gun laws to keep our communities safe. If there is one thing I have learned during my legislative career, it is the importance of persistence. We will get there.



Representative Ruth Kagi

Keeping in touch

District Address:
18560 1st Ave NE
Suite E800
Shoreline, WA 98155

District Phone:
(206) 466-5742

Olympia Phone:
(360) 786-7910

Email:
Ruth.Kagi@leg.wa.gov

Committees:

- Early Learning & Human Services (**Chair**)
- Appropriations
- Environment



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

Hearing Impaired Hotline:
1-800-833-6388



32nd Legislative District

2018

Legislative Wrap-up

INTRODUCTION

Dear Neighbors -

As many of you have heard, I recently announced my retirement from the Legislature. I feel tremendously honored to have had the opportunity to represent all of you in Olympia for the last twenty years.

Looking back on my time as a legislator, there are many things I am proud of, including my work to help foster children and homeless youth, improve the child welfare system, reform drug and juvenile justice sentencing laws, make our roads safer, and implement policies that recognize the importance of early childhood education and experiences in shaping a child's future.

My primary focus has been on making sure that all children and families in Washington have the tools, support, and resources to be successful. My work has brought about some big changes in how we deliver services to children in Washington. Over a decade ago, the Legislature created the Department of Early Learning. In 2015, I sponsored the Early Start Act which expanded high quality early learning to thousands of Washington children. Last year the Legislature created the Department of Children, Youth, and Families which brings together programs and services under one roof that will help our next generation.

As one of the longest serving legislators, I have had the opportunity to mentor many outstanding younger women legislators who have joined the Legislature over the past several years and know that I am leaving the work of child and family advocacy in good hands.

As I leave the Legislature I want to thank the constituents of the 32nd District who have given me the honor and privilege of serving in the Legislature for twenty years. I will continue to serve as your State Representative until my term ends January 7th, 2019.

With my sincere thanks and best wishes,

Ruth



OPERATING BUDGET UPDATE

After several years of strong bipartisan work on education funding reform, last year the Legislature enacted a budget that invested \$7 billion in new education funding over the next four years.

This was a promise we made to one million school kids and is part of our obligation under the Supreme Court’s court order in the McCleary case. This year, our budget continued to invest in public schools by including nearly \$1 billion more in funding for teacher salaries. While the McCleary case may be in our rearview mirror, the Legislature’s work to provide educational opportunities for all children is far from over – future legislatures still need to grapple with finding progressive sources of revenue as our booming economy slows down and we can no longer rely on revenue growth to fund our schools and other needed services.

One critical agenda item for the future is expanding the state’s investments in early learning to ensure children are reaching kindergarten ready so our investments in K-12 pay off. 47% of children currently arrive at the kindergarten door behind. While we have successfully increased the quality of our programs, we are reaching far too few children to help them get ready for school, and parents are struggling with high child care costs. I will continue to devote my energies to expanding early learning opportunities and school readiness after I leave the legislature.

In addition to funding education, the supplemental budget that the Legislature passed this year:

- Invests in our behavioral health system to help people in crisis get the assistance they need
- Expands access to higher education by drastically reducing the State Need Grant wait list
- Strengthens the safety net for struggling families and vulnerable Washingtonians

The legislature also lowered property taxes this session. With unexpected revenue growth, the Legislature decided to mitigate the steep hike in property taxes. In 2017, the Republican-controlled Senate insisted on a property tax increase in last year’s budget. This year, we voted to lower property taxes in 2019 and provide some one-time relief to constituents in the 32nd District and across the state.



VOTING

Democrats believe that voting is a right, not a privilege, and we are constantly striving to improve elections and voting processes to remove barriers that keep people from exercising their most fundamental right in a democracy. This year, with Democrats again in control of the House and Senate, we were able to pass a slate of legislation to increase participation and representation so that every voice has access to our shared democracy.

The Washington Voting Rights Act – allows communities that are systemically disenfranchised in local government elections to work collaboratively with their local governing bodies to find solutions. If this collaborative process fails, communities can then seek relief in state court. The Washington Voting Rights Act will give communities the opportunity to elect more reflective and responsive representation.

Automatic voter registration – automatically registers eligible voters when they interact

with certain government agencies, like getting an enhanced driver’s license at the Department of Licensing. When Oregon recently enacted automatic voter registration, they added nearly 300,000 new voters in just one year.

Election day registration – allows eligible voters to register to vote up to the day of the election. States with same-day voter registration see much higher participation rates than states where registration deadlines are further from Election Day.

Motor voter pre-registration for 16 and 17 year olds – allows our youngest potential voters to pre-register when they get their driving permit or license. When they turn 18, their ballot would automatically start showing up in the mail.

The Disclose Act – requires reporting of “black money” which has dodged campaign finance reporting, bringing more transparency to political spending.

IMPROVING OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

In my years at the Legislature, I have had an opportunity to glimpse into many of the barriers that our children and young people face. High-quality early learning is important for all children. But children from low-income families or children who experience abuse and neglect don’t just need high-quality early learning; these children and their families often need more support to succeed. In the past, programs for children and young people have been spread across many agencies, with no one agency responsible for improving outcomes for children and youth. Too often, the focus was on providing services in a crisis instead of reaching kids before a crisis.

Two years ago, I co-chaired the Governor’s Blue Ribbon Commission on the Delivery of Services to Children. Last year, I took the recommendations from the Commission and the Governor to successfully champion the creation of the Department of Children, Youth and Families. DCYF will have a singular focus on children and youth, will increase the likelihood that families will get referrals to appropriate services earlier, and will develop much more robust interventions for adolescents in conflict with their families. The new department by law must be transparent, report directly to the Governor, work with community partners to develop innovative interventions, and be accountable for improving outcomes for children and families.

This year I was able to get one more important piece of the child welfare puzzle in place with the passage of **House Bill 2008**, a bill I sponsored to stabilize funding for child welfare services.

Ending The Gender Wage Gap

Despite the march toward economic equality over the past 75 years, on average, women still only make 79 cents to a man’s dollar.

Too often, women don’t even know they are taking home smaller paychecks due to policies or a culture around secrecy of wages. This year, the Legislature finally passed the Equal Pay Opportunity Act which will ban pay secrecy policies, allow discussion of wages, and prohibit retaliation against workers for discussing their pay or asking for equal pay and career advancement opportunities.

The Equal Pay Opportunity Act will empower women and reaffirms Washington’s longstanding pursuit of equality in the workplace.

From 2010 to 2016, calls made to child protective services (CPS) increased 42%. Most of the blame for the increase is due to the current opioid crisis that is ripping through every corner of our state. In addition to finding ways to combat the opioid epidemic, we also needed to address the increased workload that is being created in other areas, like CPS.

The way our current budget process works, even when there are increasing numbers of calls to CPS, the funding is not adjusted. The funding for the extra workload ends up coming out of other areas, making it hard to provide consistent services to our **most** vulnerable children. This is not how it works for other, similar services like adult protective services.

HB 2008 changes the way our budget process works so that the services we provide to children are driven by the need.

While there is still much work to be done to ensure that every child has a great start at life, I am confident that the new Department, with stable and predictable funding, will have a significant impact in the lives and opportunities of Washington’s future generations. I am grateful that I am leaving at a hopeful and promising time for Washington’s children, youth and families.

History Day

My daughter Anne participated in History Day at Shorecrest High School. She researched the suffragette, Emma Smith Devoe, and developed a monologue based on primary research of Emma’s letters to and from leaders across Washington. It was the most engaging and inspiring experience in her high school education.

This session, I championed a bill to put History Day into law and ensure that this exceptional educational opportunity is available to more students across the state. \$150,000 is provided to OSPI which will run the program in partnership with the Washington State Historical Society. The Colonial Dames worked with teachers to advocate for the bill, and will help raise private funding to support statewide implementation of History Day.

