Dear Neighbors,

With acknowledgement of hardships faced and members of our community lost this past year, we are sharing this update on the 2021 Legislative Session, held virtually for the first time ever due to COVID-19. Our focus this year was on addressing the economic and health impacts of the pandemic, supporting small businesses, helping struggling families, and reducing tax burdens for those who need it most. Much of that work was done in our operating budget and our early action bills, which included:

- Property tax deferrals for businesses that lost significant revenue during the pandemic;
- Nearly $300 million in small business grants and $2.2 billion in unemployment insurance rate cuts over the next four years;
- More than $1.3 billion for vaccine and public health funding for vaccine distribution, contact tracing, and testing;
- Landlord and rental relief with $983 million to pay back due rent for businesses that lost significant revenue during the pandemic; and
- Hundreds of millions of dollars in state funding for transportation and construction projects important to our local communities.

Getting our communities back on their feet was our top priority this year, which is why we supported these investments to help struggling families and businesses. We both voted for the bipartisan Working Families Tax Exemption, which puts hundreds of dollars back in the pockets of families who qualify for the earned income tax credit. We also voted to exempt businesses from paying the business and occupation tax on any federal aid funds, expand broadband access, and increase the reach of the Mainstreet Program, which helps revitalize downtowns across the state.

One of the best ways to boost the local economy is through the state capital budget, and we are proud to have secured over $127 million for local projects in our district. That includes nearly $12 million for new water treatment plants for the City of DuPont and Lakewood Water District, $3 million for the Center for Innovative Learning and Engagement at Tacoma Community College, restoration of salmon habitat at the McNeil Island Estuary, and safety and security improvements at Western State Hospital.

Next session, we hope COVID-19 will be behind us and we will return to Olympia to advocate on your behalf. If you have questions about the session or need help accessing services, please reach out to our offices. It is our honor to serve as your state representatives.

Sincerely,

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Keeping our communities safe is a critical role of government. I was proud to sponsor a bill that expands Washington’s existing Good Samaritan Law by providing immunity protection to emergency services volunteers, who assist with emergencies and natural disasters (HB 1209). Previously, the law only covered medical response, but now our extension will allow people the peace of mind to contribute their skills and knowledge when responding to disasters.

We know the importance of creating equitable and sustainable public safety models for our communities and that a legal response is not always the only mechanism to keep people safe, so we increased funding for diversion programs to steer people towards treatment and recovery when appropriate for certain substance use and behavioral health needs. Legislation I passed (HB 1276) will improve initial treatment, evaluation, and emergency care for people experiencing these crises by allowing emergency medical services personnel to work in diversion centers. This will help ensure a more appropriate care setting than jails or emergency rooms and save diversion centers. This will help ensure a more appropriate care setting than jails or emergency rooms and save diversion centers.

Our vision is threefold: everyone who needs care can now be used to deliver meals, homework, and supplies to students during a local, state, or national emergency (SB 5128). Health care professionals who can no longer work due to contracting or being exposed to COVID-19 or another disease subject to a public health emergency will now be eligible for presumptive benefits. These workers also now qualify for unemployment insurance if they had to leave work to quarantine (SB 5190).

Our district is home to Camp Murray, where the Washington National Guard has been at the forefront of the pandemic by administering vaccines, supporting local food banks and pitching in at the Employment Security Department. This year, we secured over $17 million for new infrastructure at Camp Murray to support their work for our communities.

Almost every session, the Legislature is challenged with ensuring reimbursement rates for nursing facilities are keeping up with the cost of providing care. We delivered on this challenge by crafting a budget that continues temporary COVID-19 rate increases for long term care and developmental disability provider rates, increases developmental disabilities waiver capacity, provides funding to implement the nursing home rate methodology, and funds community investments in long term care throughout the state. The pandemic showed the critical necessity of telemedicine to keep our neighbors healthy — particularly in rural communities where health care services may be hours away. I was proud to support legislation to expand access to audio-only telemedicine (HB 1196) and allow respiratory therapists to provide care through telemedicine (HB 1383).

LISTENING TO OUR CRITICAL WORKFORCE

Most deserving of our appreciation are the educators, health care workers, and many others who have put their lives on the line to keep us safe. This year, we adjusted the funding formula for student transportation to ensure staff and bus services can now be used to deliver meals, homework, and supplies to students during a local, state, or national emergency (SB 5128). Health care professionals who can no longer work due to contracting or being exposed to COVID-19 or another disease subject to a public health emergency will now be eligible for presumptive benefits. These workers also now qualify for unemployment insurance if they had to leave work to quarantine (SB 5190).

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