

11TH LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT • 2022 LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

STATE REPRESENTATIVE STEVE BERGQUIST

PO Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600



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CONTACT:

Phone: 253-214-3275
Email: Steve.Bergquist@leg.wa.gov

OLYMPIA OFFICE:

322 John L. O'Brien Building
PO Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504

WEBSITE:

housedemocrats.wa.gov/bergquist

COMMITTEES:

Appropriations (*vice chair*)
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Rules

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Neighbors,

Our 2022 60-day legislative session just finished. We focused on strengthening our community by supporting students, families and small businesses, while making big investments in a recovery that moves everyone forward.

It's an honor to serve as your state representative. In this newsletter, you'll find more information about our work and how you can be more involved. Thanks to your input, we were able to accomplish some amazing wins for our community!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steve Bergquist".

Steve Bergquist



SUPPORTING STUDENTS, FAMILIES AND EDUCATORS

As a teacher and a legislator, I believe **every student deserves a fair opportunity to learn and grow**. This year, we passed policies that prioritize student well-being, expand accessibility and cultural competency and ensure educators and students have the resources to thrive — both during the pandemic and well beyond. We also made higher education more accessible for everyone, so people can get the degree or credential they need for a stable, good-paying job.

Here are some key steps we took to improve K-12 and higher education:

- **House Bill 1878:** Expands the free school meal program to 92,000 additional students
- **House Bill 1664:** Brings more counselors, nurses and social workers into schools to help address the devastating toll the pandemic has had on youth mental health
- **House Bill 1153:** Increases language access in our schools to help ensure all parents and families can actively engage in their student's learning and development
- **House Bill 1736:** Creates a state student loan program with an interest rate of just 1%, far below most federal or private loans. This new law will help low-income undergraduate AND graduate students avoid crushing, high-interest student loan debt
- **House Bill 1835:** Boosts outreach efforts on Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) completion so we can help students with financial aid and they can succeed academically

We also passed a budget that invests in K-12 education, along with college and workforce development. It includes funding for teacher salaries; outdoor education; school nutrition; financial aid outreach and supports; and health care and nursing education, training and tuition assistance.



BUDGETING WITH OUR VALUES FOR A BETTER STATE

In 2021, we passed a budget to support people, small businesses and communities hit hardest by the pandemic. This year, we continued supporting those hurt most during this pandemic. Our state budget makes much-needed investments in our communities:

- **Economic recovery:** Expanded small business B&O tax credits; \$100 million for restaurants and other hospitality businesses; and \$25 million for arts, heritage and cultural organizations
- **Youth and families:** \$245 million to increase funding for child care and providers and give stipends to youth who aged out of extended foster care during the pandemic
- **Homelessness and housing:** \$318 million for utility and rent assistance, landlord cost mitigation and homeless service and shelter providers, as well as a transfer of \$500 million to bolster the Housing Trust Fund to help fund affordable housing
- **Behavioral health:** \$277 million to support substance use and mental health providers, recovery and treatment; housing and employment; and funding for crisis, outreach and diversion programs
- **Natural resources:** \$304 million to increase funding for salmon habitat and recovery, recreational lands maintenance and wildfire suppression and recovery

SERVING OUR DISTRICT AND HEARING FROM YOU

One of my priorities this session was serving Washingtonians better. That's why I'm proud to share that we passed two bills I introduced to address school staffing shortages and make retirement benefits more secure for firefighters and law enforcement officers.

Retired state employees and teachers are limited in how many hours they can work in public service while still receiving their retirement benefits. Many retirees work in schools as substitute teachers, bus drivers and nutrition staff, but are typically limited to 867 hours per year of work. My bill increases this cap on retiree employment in schools for three years. Meanwhile, another bill I helped pass provides options for an increase in retirement benefits for Law Enforcement Officers' and Fire Fighters' Retirement System Plan 2 (LEOFF 2) members.

It's my hope that these two bills — and the many other bills we passed this session — will make a difference in our community. It's my responsibility to listen to you so we can build a better state. Please reach out with questions, comments or ideas.

