

# 2023 SESSION REPORT TO THE 24<sup>th</sup> DISTRICT



Dear friends and neighbors,

June 2023

With this year's Legislative Session officially behind us, your 24th District delegation wants to give you a brief but thorough update on the budgets and policies passed this year to make a difference in the lives of Washington families.

The two-year **\$69.3 billion Operating Budget** is an ambitious and responsible funding plan to address the state's most pressing needs and invest in critical services such as behavioral health, public schools, and housing. It also leaves **\$3 billion** in total reserves and **does not rely on any new taxes or fees**.

You'll find more detailed information on some of these areas in this newsletter, but here's a quick snapshot of **major investments**:

- **\$2.1 billion**: Behavioral health services, public health, and health care
- **\$1.8 billion**: Long-term care and developmental disabilities
- **\$2.2 billion**: K-12 education & **\$382 million** for higher education and workforce development
- **\$684 million**: Natural resources, wildfire prevention, and clean energy
- **\$590 million**: Services for children, youth, and families
- **\$519 million**: Homelessness and housing
- **\$397 million**: Human services, poverty reduction, and Working Families Tax Credit
- **\$253 million**: Public safety, legal aid, and corrections

This budget is a reflection of our values, our commitments, and our goals. The funds allocated will help ensure success, safety, and stability for Washingtonians here in the 24th, and in every corner of the state.

Sincerely,

Representative Steve Tharinger

Senator Kevin Van De Wege

Representative Mike Chapman



Washington's new **Working Families Tax Credit** is currently accepting applications for up to \$1,200 a year for low-income families. It also finally eliminates the state's unfunded pension liability for state retirement plans, saving the state billions of dollars over the next decade. Go to [workingfamiliescredit.wa.gov](https://workingfamiliescredit.wa.gov) to see if your family qualifies.

## Behavioral Health and Health Care

The state operating and capital budgets work together to invest in behavioral health and health care. In the operating budget, there's **\$1.1 billion** for behavioral health, providing the staffing and services we need, while the capital budget builds the facilities where those services are housed. The operating budget also includes **\$1.8 billion** for long-term care and services for those with developmental disabilities, along with **\$1 billion** for public health and health care, including better reimbursement rates for health care workers, pediatricians, and primary care doctors.

Extending the hospital safety net assessment will help our rural hospitals maintain services for our communities. Without taking this action, access and options for care would have been put at risk.

The capital budget puts serious funding toward tackling our state's behavioral health challenges, with **\$77.9 million** for community behavioral health facilities, **\$13.4 million** for the Rising Strong project to provide family-centered drug treatment and supportive housing, and **\$133.1 million** for local facilities that provide crisis diversion, secure detox, and adolescent services.

On the mental health front, there's **\$613 million** in the construction budget for a new 350-bed forensic hospital at Western State and **\$21.1 million** for renovations at Maple Lane to expand capacity by 136 beds.



## Protecting Reproductive Rights

With the Supreme Court overturning *Roe v. Wade*, abortion laws are now up to the states. Washington has long led the way on reproductive freedom, starting with making abortion legal two years before Roe. Over the last few years, we have defeated Republican efforts to erode abortion access, and strengthened reproductive rights by improving access to the full range of reproductive care.

We believe people should be free to make the family planning decisions that are best for them, and we are committed to protecting these long-existing rights for Washingtonians and those seeking care from other states. To this end, we passed several bills:

- **SB 5242** prohibits cost-sharing for abortion.
- **HB 1155**, the **My Health My Data Act**, protects personal health data. It is the first law in the nation to require companies, like period-tracking applications, to get a person's consent to collect, share or sell their health data.
- **HB 1469**, the **Shield Law**, protects people seeking an abortion in Washington, as well as providers, from prosecution in other states.
- **HB 1340** protects health providers from professional disciplinary action in Washington for performing procedures that are legal here, regardless of punishments in other states.

This year, we allocated **\$17 million** to protect access to reproductive care and to support clinics experiencing an influx of out-of-state patients. We also added **\$7 million** to the current year's budget.

We're proud of the actions we took this year to strengthen the freedom of choice for Washington women.

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## Public Safety

Washington residents expect our legal system to be balanced, fair, and accessible to everyone. Some of the measures we passed this year will improve domestic violence protections (**HB 1715**), support crime victims and witnesses with victim-centered, trauma-informed responses in the legal system (**HB 1028**), provide civil remedies for unauthorized disclosure of intimate images (**HB 1165**), and increase the penalty for hazing (**HB 1002**).

The input of communities across the state on the issue of vehicle pursuits was pivotal in passing legislation to ease restrictions (**SB 5352**) because, while pursuits can be unsafe, police officers need the necessary tools to go after dangerous suspects who flee. This bill lowers the standard for vehicle pursuits to reasonable suspicion, ensuring that police can pursue dangerous suspects while allowing each community to set a pursuit policy that works best for them.

As you know, we held a one-day special session to address the pressing issue of drug possession. A little background: in 2021, the **State Supreme Court's Blake decision** struck

down Washington's felony statute on simple drug possession, decriminalizing the possession of small amounts of drugs. In response, we passed a temporary measure, which was due to expire in July. It was imperative to come up with a solution so on May 16 we convened in Olympia to pass a **bipartisan bill that strikes a good balance between compassion and consequences**, for people working their way through addiction. The main points of **SB 5536** are:

- Setting the penalty for possession of controlled substances at a gross misdemeanor, with a maximum of 180 days in jail for each of the first two convictions, and 364 days for the third and beyond. Fines are capped at a maximum of \$1,000 for a single conviction.
- Establishing a system for pre-trial diversion into treatment and requiring mandatory early conviction vacation if a person can prove they have completed treatment or have "substantially complied" with the recovery navigator program or similar services for six months.
- Creating the crime of public use to address the problem of people using drugs in community spaces.

The bill also invests **\$63 million** for things like short-term housing, training for law enforcement, and support for substance abuse treatment providers. These investments will work hand in hand with additional funding in other behavioral health and housing programs passed this session.

No single piece of legislation can solve the substance use crisis our state is facing, but this measure is an important bipartisan step forward to support a statewide public health approach that balances treatment and accountability. This bill ramps up recovery support that is proven to work, builds out low-barrier treatment, and takes steps to ensure that the collateral consequences of a conviction don't prevent people from rebuilding their lives.



## Rural Infrastructure and Jobs

We want to highlight a couple of bipartisan bills, sponsored by Rep. Tharinger, that will boost jobs and infrastructure in timber and farm country.

- **HB 1267** gives rural counties a tool to build the infrastructure they need for economic development. Since 1998, we've used part of the sales tax revenue that would ordinarily go to the state for this purpose. This legislation extends this program another 20 years, which gives counties the certainty they need to issue bonds that finance projects. This is great news because you need to issue bonds to build anything significant.
- **HB 1018** deals with the tax break on turning waste into fuel. You may also know this as biomass or hog fuel, which is used to be burned in the forest or hauled into landfills. Instead, this legislation makes it economically feasible to use this waste to generate power. It also helps make farms and timber operations both profitable and sustainable.



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## Agriculture and Natural Resources

Agriculture and natural resources are essential for sustaining life, providing food, shelter, and raw materials for various industries. All three of us are keenly aware that districts like ours are central to the economic well-being of the rest of the state and we consistently work on developing policies focused on the challenges rural communities face. Some of this year's highlights include:

### Droughts and Wildfires

- **HB 1138**, introduced by Rep. Chapman, improves and speeds up the state's response when and where we get hit by a drought.
- **HB 1578** improves community preparedness, response, recovery, and resilience to wildland fire health and safety impacts like smoke exposure, post-wildfire debris flow and evacuation strategies.
- **HB 1498** directs the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to include aviation usage by local and tribal fire departments for the initial attack phase of firefighting in its annual wildfire report to the Legislature.

### Food Production

- **HB 1500** updates the state's management of cottage food operations by increasing the cap on annual gross sales, which define cottage food operations, from \$25,000 to \$35,000, and directs the Department of Agriculture to

increase the cap every four years. The bill also requires that cottage food licenses be renewed every two years, instead of annually.

- **SB 5341** supports Washington producers by establishing a location-based program to promote Washington-grown-and-made agricultural products.

### Derelict Vessels

- **HB 1753** expedites the removal of derelict vessels to protect public safety and shoreline ecosystems.
- **SB 5192** streamlines derelict vessels appeals.
- **SB 5433** authorizes DNR to acquire and remove, refurbish, or dispose of derelict structures on nearshore waters.

### Land Management

- **SB 5353** expands the Voluntary Stewardship Program which provides a framework and funding for managing critical areas at a watershed scale and facilitates collaboration among farmers, landowners, environmentalists, tribes, and regulators.
- **HB 1775** protects Regional Fisheries Enhancement Groups performing salmon habitat restoration from civil liability for property damage they cause, unless the damage is due to gross negligence or willful or wanton misconduct.

## K-12 Education

Every student deserves a fair opportunity to learn, grow, and develop into Washington's next generation of leaders. That's why we are **making the largest investment in K-12 education** since the McCleary court decision for continued rollout of the past biennium's investments in nurses, counselors, and social workers in schools, lowering the financial burden on school districts. Special education and funding to create more slots for children eligible for the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program are also included in this budget.

Some of the bills we passed to provide students across Washington the additional tools they need to succeed include fueling their learning with increased access to free school meals (**HB 1238**), expanding high-school graduation pathway options (**HB 1308**), as well as the Running Start Program (**HB 1316**), and ensuring access to recess so our kids get adequate time to play (**SB 5257**).

## Postsecondary Education and Workforce

The future of Washington depends on effective workforce development and economic stability, so this session we expanded access to financial aid (**HB 1232**), modified the Washington Student Loan Program (**HB 1823**), provided additional supports for the administration of the Washington Opportunity Scholarship (**HB 1289**), and addressed students' basic needs with the Benefit Navigator Program (**HB 1559**).

Acknowledging that we need more trained behavioral health professionals, we also passed legislation to grow our workforce in that field by reducing barriers (**HB 1724**) and adopting the mental health counselors compact (**HB 1069**).

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## Housing Capacity and Affordability

An investment of **\$519 million in the operating budget** will go toward housing and the immediate shelter needs of people experiencing homelessness across our state, including the state's successful Right of Way Safety Initiative to transition unsheltered people to safer housing and services. Combined with investments from the capital budget, new housing-related investments **will exceed \$1 billion**.

Housing prices across the state, and here in the 24th District, continue climbing. This is tough on families and businesses who can't fill open positions when the workers they try to hire for jobs can't afford a home to rent or buy within commuting distance.

Here are some of the reforms we passed to help fix this problem:

- **Faster permits (SB 5290)**—Consolidates and improves the local permit process, which in some places had caused long delays in housing construction.
- **Using existing buildings for housing (HB 1042)**—Existing buildings are already financed and are connected to services. This law removes barriers to create housing using these structures.
- **Mother-in-law units (HB 1337)**—This is a proven solution to creating affordable housing and giving homeowners an easy way to bring in more family or additional income.
- **Middle housing (HB 1110)**—Today, housing tends to be single-family homes or apartments, with little in between. Our grandparents had a much bigger mix of housing to choose from, including townhouses, cottage courts, and four-plexes. This legislation could be a huge help to build housing in our state's bigger cities, which will help take the pressure off (and lower prices) here in the 24th District and elsewhere.

## Historic Capital Budget

We passed a historic **\$9 billion** state construction budget with unanimous votes in the House and Senate—proving that when we listen to each other with respect and work together, big things are possible.

This budget will create jobs in every corner of the state while tackling our common needs, including affordable housing, health care, and education.

### Statewide Highlights

- **\$200 million:** broadband internet in unserved and underserved communities
- **\$423.8 million:** clean energy and climate change projects
- **\$81.6 million:** state parks
- **\$1.5 billion:** higher education construction
- **\$872 million:** public schools
- **\$70.4 million:** early learning facilities
- **\$400 million:** Housing Trust Fund
- **\$170 million:** affordable housing and shelters

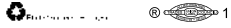
A significant budget item for our community is the distribution of approximately **\$83 million** from the state timber tax account to timber harvesting counties. This money will go directly toward capital projects around our district, school improvements, roads, libraries, and fire districts.

### 24th District Projects

- **\$2 million:** YMCA Early Learning Center in Port Angeles
- **\$18.5 million:** North Shore Levee in Grays Harbor
- **\$13 million:** Jamestown S'Klallam Behavioral Health Center in Sequim
- **\$2 million:** Port Angeles Field Arts & Events Hall
- **\$4 million:** Jefferson Health Clinic in Port Townsend
- **\$8 million:** Queets Generations Building
- **\$70 million:** Chehalis Basin Strategy
- **\$1.6 million:** Montesano Community Forest
- **\$44 million:** Duckabush Estuary habitat restoration
- **\$5.2 million:** Devil's Lake

Go to [fiscal.wa.gov/statebudgets/CapitalDistrictMap](https://fiscal.wa.gov/statebudgets/CapitalDistrictMap) for more information on these projects.

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#### **Committees**

- Capital Budget (Chair)
- Appropriations
- Health Care & Wellness



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#### **Committees**

- Agriculture, Water, Natural Resources & Parks (Chair)
- Health & Long Term Care
- Ways & Means



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#### **Committees**

- Agriculture and Natural Resources (Chair)
- Consumer Protection & Business
- Transportation