

2024 SESSION REPORT TO THE 21ST LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT



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May 2024

Dear friends and neighbors,

Over the course of the 60-day legislative session, we built on six years' worth of transformational legislation that continues to put people first.

We increased support for public education, continued to improve and expand our transportation infrastructure, added to a record investment in affordable housing, put money back in the pockets of working families to pay their utility bills, and improved access to the Working Families Tax Credit.

We protected our natural environment and accelerated our state's transition to the new clean energy economy, while strengthening protections for workers. We continued to build out the behavioral health crisis and treatment system and passed legislation to address the fentanyl epidemic.

And we maintained our efforts to make our communities safer through firearm safety and by expanding recruitment and improving retention of a diverse, highly trained law enforcement workforce.

In this report, you'll find budget highlights and summaries of many of those measures.

It is an honor to serve as your 21st district lawmakers, and we would not be able to do this work without your support and feedback—thank you for your continued engagement in the legislative process.

Please reach out to our offices if you have any questions or need help accessing services.

Sincerely,

Three handwritten signatures in blue ink, corresponding to Sen. Marko Liias, Rep. Lillian Ortiz-Self, and Rep. Strom Peterson.

2024 REPORT TO THE 21ST DISTRICT

HOUSING

Last session, the legislature made significant progress on increasing housing supply by expanding the use of familiar housing options like duplexes and townhomes ([HB 1110](#) and [HB 1337](#)). The House and Senate also invested a record \$400 million into affordable housing through the Housing Trust Fund in the 2023 Capital Budget and an additional \$127.5 million in the 2024 supplemental budget.

This session, House and Senate Democrats continued to expand our ability to increase housing supply by accelerating the construction of affordable workforce housing ([HB 1892](#)), preventing common-interest communities from imposing arbitrary occupancy limits ([HB 1054](#)), paving the way for co-living housing ([HB 1998](#)), and expanding protections for mobile home park tenants ([SB 6059](#)).

There is still more work to be done. Legislation to stabilize rent increases ([HB 2114/SB 5961](#)), increase development near transit ([HB 2160/SB 6024](#)), and establish a statewide department of housing ([HB 2270](#)) came up short of the governor's desk. These bills are critical in addressing our housing affordability crisis and will likely be revisited in future sessions.



FENTANYL/OPIOID CRISIS

Families in communities across our state and our country have felt the impact of the fentanyl crisis. Last year, the drug claimed more than 112,000 lives across America, surpassing all prior overdose epidemics our country has gone through.

We are not immune here. Washington ranks 18th among all states in overdose deaths, according to data compiled by the Centers for Disease Control.

Through better access to education, treatment, prevention and facilities, we are working to turn the tide of this crisis.

The capital construction budget provides a total of \$82.7 million in behavioral health community capacity grants to build behavioral health care facilities in communities across Washington. The operating budget also invests heavily in access to treatment, education, awareness, outreach, and prevention with \$215 million in new funding. That is on top of the additional \$245 million in behavioral health capacity, rate increases, and outpatient and personal care programs.



We are proud of the bipartisan steps we took to focus on treatment and prevention. We passed a bill to require a statewide drug overdose prevention and education campaign ([SB 5906](#).) We made sure all students have access to the most up-to-date materials and learning standards on fentanyl, opioids and other life-threatening drug use ([HB 1956](#).) We took steps to make sure vulnerable children aren't left in dangerous situations where they could be exposed to fentanyl ([SB 6109](#)) and we created the Tribal Opioid Prevention and Treatment account to help our tribal partners who are disproportionately impacted by the fentanyl crisis ([SB 6099](#).)

We also made sure that all K-12 and higher education institutions stock life-saving overdose reversal medication ([SB 5804](#) and [HB 2112](#).)

Addiction impacts us all. It doesn't matter where we live or how we vote, every family in every community has been touched by this crisis. It's important that we continue our bipartisan work to give people the tools they need to fight this scourge.



Representative Strom Peterson

PUBLIC SAFETY

One of the most important jobs of the legislature is to ensure the safety of all Washingtonians. Whether that's through commonsense gun laws, safer roads, or well-trained and supported law enforcement, there are many steps lawmakers took to ensure our communities are safe.

We are proud of the work we have done in recent years to keep firearms out of the hands of people who are at high risk to harm themselves or others. This session we added libraries, zoos, aquariums and transit facilities to the list of places where open carry is banned. We changed the law to require gun owners to report within 24 hours if a firearm is lost or stolen and voted to allow the Washington State Patrol to destroy, rather than sell, seized weapons. We also made sure that firearms dealers who do business in our state safely store their inventory.

We also took additional steps to improve traffic safety in our state, building on our work to make Washington safer for all drivers, transit riders, bicyclists and pedestrians.

In total, we put \$31 million toward safety enhancements in this year's transportation budget. \$8.5 million of that goes to communities around our state to improve bike, pedestrian and school zone safety. Investments are also made to prevent deadly wrong way driving accidents and to continue work to clean up safety risks associated with homeless encampments along our state's rights-of-way.

We also made investments to step up DUI enforcement and ensure that more ignition interlock devices are installed on the vehicles of drivers with impaired driving offenses.

We also invested in training additional Washington State Patrol troopers and established a longevity bonus for troopers to help attract and retain more officers.

Speaking of law enforcement, we took decisive steps forward to help attract more police officers to departments throughout our state.



In 2023 we invested \$11.4 million to open three new Regional Training Academies in Pasco and in Snohomish and Clark Counties. By offering potential recruits training closer to their homes, we are addressing staffing shortages and strengthening the essential bond between officers and the communities they seek to protect. We're already seeing the results as new officers are graduating and new recruits are applying.

We also passed a bill to allow law enforcement agencies to adopt flexible work schedules to help departments staff busy weekends, retain parents, officers pursuing higher education, and senior officers who cannot maintain a 40-hour workweek. This bill gives agencies the freedom they need to keep valuable officers employed and provide enough officers on duty to keep our neighborhoods safe. Another important bill ([HB 2311](#)) creates a task force to track and address the mental health and overall well-being of all first responders.

Through a combination of funding, flexibility and policy changes, our goal is to create and retain more officers who are well trained and already invested in the communities they are asked to protect and serve.



ENVIRONMENT

The effects of climate change are wide-ranging and severe. Democrats in the House and Senate continue to take steps to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions. This session, legislation was passed to advance the adoption of zero-emission school buses in Washington, especially in districts disproportionately affected by pollutions ([HB 1368](#)).

The legislature also passed policies to endorse Puget Sound Energy's efforts to move on from natural gas to cleaner energy sources ([HB 1589](#)), and to link the state's carbon market with the markets in California and Quebec ([SB 6058](#)).

2024 REPORT TO THE 21ST DISTRICT



Representative Lillian Ortiz-Self

SUPPORTING WORKERS

Strong families depend on access to good jobs and our economy relies on a healthy, skilled workforce, that's why House and Senate Democrats are putting Washington's working families first with labor policies that increase opportunity, encourage diversity, and promote fairness, equity, and justice. Because economic growth is not just about prosperity, it's about building an economy that gives everyone a real and fair chance to succeed.

This session we expanded access to paid sick leave ([SB 5793](#)), increased access to disability benefits for workers ([HB 1927](#)), and allowed surviving family members of rideshare drivers killed on the job access to death benefits so they can make ends meet ([HB 2382](#)). We expanded the definition of 'protected classes' to include gender, race, disability, sexual identity, immigration or military status, or any other group of people who may experience discrimination in the workplace ([HB 1905](#)), and protected workers from unwanted religious or political speech unrelated to their jobs while on the clock ([SB 5778](#)). We upgraded sanitary conditions for workers who are menstruating and/or expressing milk ([HB 2266](#)), and improved workplace standards and protections for adult entertainers and LGBTQ-friendly establishments ([SB 6105](#)). We also relieved interest on unemployment insurance overpayments during the pandemic ([HB 1975](#)).



EDUCATION

Every student, regardless of their background, deserves access to the necessary resources, opportunities, and assistance to flourish throughout their entire educational journey. This year, House and Senate Democrats passed several measures geared toward providing a high-quality education in a system that is fair and that fosters the growth and development of every student in Washington so they can succeed in school and in life.



We lifted the cap to allow more funding for special education ([HB 2180](#)) and shifted the burden of proof in special education due process hearings from the student's parents to the school district ([SB 5883](#)). We directed new funding to support paraeducators in classrooms ([SB 5882](#)) and increased funding for schools daily basic operating costs ([HB 2494](#)).

We expanded dual and Tribal language programs ([HB 1228](#)) to nurture cultural diversity and unlock the potential of every child. We also took steps to stop would-be book bans ([HB 2331](#)) and ensured that students in our state learn about the contributions of ALL Washingtonians so they can see themselves reflected in the school's curriculum ([SB 5462](#)). And we reduced the burden of debt by ensuring students and their parents know about dual credit programs and financial aid opportunities ([HB 1146](#)).

HIGHER EDUCATION

With the challenges of today's knowledge-based economy—in which most jobs require credentials beyond high school—the way to a gainful, productive, and fulfilling future is squarely dependent on marketable skills. This is why House and Senate Democrats continue to fight for improved access and opportunity, because every Washingtonian deserves the chance to chase their dreams.

This session we expanded pre-eligibility for the Washington College Grant ([HB 2214](#)), aligned financial eligibility for federal and state aid programs ([SB 5904](#)), increased opportunities for college students receiving federal work-study funds ([HB 2025](#)), and improved access to the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program ([HB 1950](#)). We also established a Native American apprenticeship assistance program ([HB 2019](#)) and created a health corps behavioral health scholarship ([HB 1946](#)) aimed at increasing access to these services for marginalized communities.

FERRIES

Washington's ferries are iconic and synonymous with our state, just like apples, salmon, orcas and airplanes. Our ferries are also a critical part of our economy and the day-to-day life of millions of people, including so many of you.

That's why it's so important we build a ferry system that keeps up with the needs of our community. The challenges our ferries have faced the last several years are well documented. Our hope is that investments made into our ferry system thanks to the Climate Commitment Act will allow us to finally build new boats as well as keep up with the needs of a system that so many of us rely on each day.

Since the CCA was passed into law in 2021, it has played a pivotal role in the rebirth of our ferry system and in our ability to create a more reliable, 21st century ferry fleet. We kept the momentum going this year with a \$196 million investment in Washington State Ferries—all from the CCA.

Those dollars go directly toward efforts to build new hybrid electric ferries and projects related to strengthening Washington's existing fleet. The bulk of that money goes toward conversions for all five new hybrid electric vessels and charging infrastructure, with completion of half of those ready by approximately 2028.

We also prioritized the workforce needs of the ferry system, building on \$36.6 million put toward staffing the last two years. There's an additional \$16.5 million in the budget to hire additional crew, as well as funding for additional dispatch and service planning staff. The budget also provides for expanded passenger service in King and Kitsap counties, and increased training opportunities to address workforce shortages.

Washington's ferry fleet is as iconic as it is unique, but it also presents challenges. A successful, reliable fleet pays dividends in terms of increased commerce and tourism. A poorly funded fleet brings the opposite. We're proud of the direction our fleet is headed in and excited about the future of this iconic, distinctively Washington entity.



Senator Marko Lias

HUMAN SERVICES, YOUTH & EARLY LEARNING

Our commitment to children, youth and families is about more than just policy; it is about our values and the kind of society we want for ourselves and for future generations. To that end, this session we passed bills that will make a meaningful difference in the lives of many Washingtonians.

We are providing our youngest residents with the best possible start in life by ensuring that infants and toddlers receive the early support they need ([HB 1916](#)), breaking down administrative barriers to early childhood education and care ([HB 1945](#)), expanding time limit exemptions for cash assistance programs through Temporary Assistance for Needy Families ([HB 2007](#)), and helping families bridge short-term financial gaps by increasing the grant amount for Diversion Cash Assistance ([HB 2415](#)).

On the behavioral health front, we are facilitating easier access to services for children and young adults ([HB 2256](#)) and ensuring that minors receive appropriate and timely care during mental health crises ([SB 5853](#)). We are also addressing legal financial obligations inflicted on juveniles by invalidating unenforceable debts ([SB 5974](#)) and extending foster care services for youth ages 18 to 21 so they can better transition to adulthood ([SB 5908](#)).

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SEN. MARKO LIAS • REP. LILLIAN ORTIZ-SELF • REP. STROM PETERSON

TAX FAIRNESS

Washington has one of the most regressive tax systems in the country, which hurts our state's ability to support overburdened communities and families who need a hand. Adequate revenue is not the only objective in creating an equitable state budget—it matters where the revenue comes from. The very people who need help the most cannot and should not disproportionately carry the responsibility of funding the services and programs our communities need.

This session, House and Senate Democrats continued to work to fix the state's regressive tax code by improving the Working Families Tax Credit program by streamlining the application process, simplifying income verification, and eliminating unnecessary delays ([HB 1895](#)). This builds on last sessions' work to expand the Working Families Tax Credit ([HB 1477](#)).

CAPITAL BUDGET INVESTMENTS

The state's Capital (or Construction) Budget funds important projects like affordable housing, behavioral health clinics, schools and more. This year the legislature added \$127.5 million for affordable housing through the Housing Trust Fund. The budget also invested another \$82.7 million in behavioral health community capacity grants to expand our ability to help our neighbors who experience behavioral health challenges.

Our district specifically received \$834,000 in important community and conservation grants for local projects. Those include:

- \$300,000 for the Edmonds Boys & Girls Club capital project
- \$250,000 for the PAWS Community Support Center—which will provide important spay and neuter services
- \$284,000 to correct the North Creek fish barrier