

Rep. Kristine Reeves

2024 LEGISLATIVE WRAP-UP

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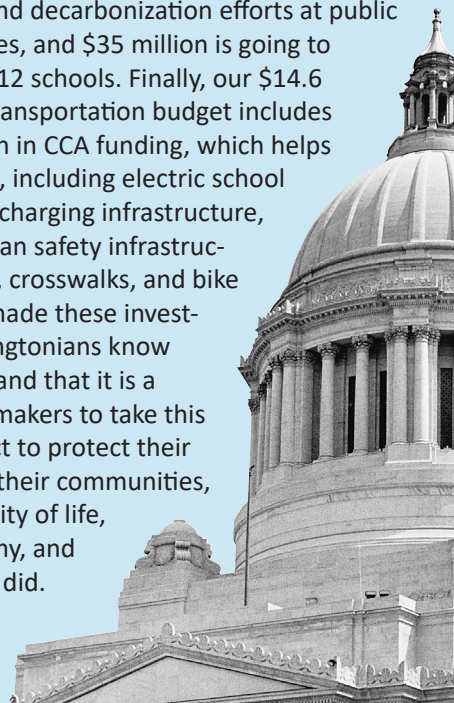
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ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP *continued*

- **HB 2330** would create a work group to enhance wildfire mitigation, share data, create insurance transparency, and establish a grant program to help mitigate property loss due to wildfires. It was also unfortunately unsuccessful this session.
- The Solar Consumer Protections Act (**HB 2156**) focuses on protecting homeowners as we implement incentives at the state and federal level designed to encourage the use of solar panels to promote energy efficiency and environmental protections. This new law will protect consumers from bad actors in the solar market by requiring certain licenses or certifications to ensure that work is completed.

When it comes to investments in clean energy and environmental protections, all three supplemental budgets included funding, most of which comes from the Climate Commitment Act (CCA). The supplemental operating budget includes \$335 million in environmental funding, including payments to agricultural fuel users exempt from the CCA and existing clean energy and climate programs to help communities prepare for droughts, flooding, and other potential risks stemming from the climate crisis. It also includes \$150 million dedicated to clean energy credits for low-income households, so we can help more Washington families afford to heat and cool their homes.

The supplemental capital construction budget includes \$688 million from CCA accounts, of which \$195 million is dedicated for clean energy development and energy efficiency, \$138 million is slated for natural resource conservation and carbon sequestration, \$90 million is allocated for energy efficiency and decarbonization efforts at public colleges and universities, and \$35 million is going to clean air projects at K-12 schools. Finally, our \$14.6 billion supplemental transportation budget includes more than \$300 million in CCA funding, which helps fund a variety of items, including electric school buses, electric vehicle charging infrastructure, public transit, pedestrian safety infrastructure such as sidewalks, crosswalks, and bike lanes, and more. We made these investments because Washingtonians know climate change is real and that it is a threat. They want lawmakers to take this threat seriously and act to protect their families, their homes, their communities, their health, their quality of life, and our strong economy, and that's exactly what we did.



STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 30th DISTRICT
Kristine Reeves

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Dear Friends and Neighbors,

Optimistic and determined – these two words encapsulate the spirit of the 2024 Legislative Session. This session was about setting a tone of unity and progress for our state.

With 373 bills sent to the governor's desk, including 80% that passed with strong bipartisan support, we demonstrated our commitment to effective governance. These bills, crafted with input from diverse voices across the state, address critical issues facing our communities.

From housing and childcare to tackling the fentanyl crisis and combating climate change, our agenda was centered on equity and progress for all.

Our achievements in housing and childcare are particularly noteworthy. With legislation to create more flexible housing options and streamline childcare access, we're working to ensure that every Washingtonian has a stable home and quality childcare. Additionally, our investments in early learning and affordable housing reflect our commitment to supporting working families.

The fentanyl and opioid crisis also demanded urgent action. Through legislation focused on prevention, education, and treatment, we're combatting this epidemic head-on. By providing support services and housing for those in recovery, we're building a stronger, healthier Washington for all.

On the climate front, I'm proud that we championed clean energy initiatives that protect our environment and public health. Legislation to advance zero-emission school buses and support clean energy development demonstrates our commitment to a sustainable future.

Equity was at the forefront of our agenda, with bills to promote equal pay, LGBTQ+ inclusion in education, and representation for marginalized communities. By passing legislation like the Nothing About Us Without Us Act and recognizing Lunar New Year as an official legislatively recognized day, we're fostering a more inclusive and representative government.

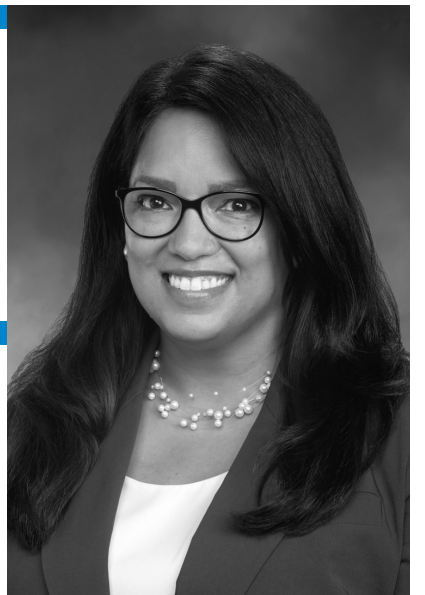
Community safety was also paramount, with bills addressing traffic hazards, catalytic converter theft, and gun violence.

Reflecting on this session, I'm optimistic for the future and my commitment to serving Washingtonians remains unwavering. Looking ahead, your feedback and participation are key to making effective changes. Let's keep working together to address these important issues in our community. I appreciate your engagement and civic participation.

Inside this newsletter, you can read more about my commitment and work on my top three legislative priorities from the 2024 session: the economy, education, and the environment.

Thank You,

Rep. Kristine Reeves



Keeping in Touch

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Kristine Reeves

ECONOMIC RESILIENCY

Washington state was recently ranked as having the best economy in the nation by WalletHub, named one of the top five states for working parents, and designated the best state to find a job (also by WalletHub). Much of these accolades are owed to policies such as our nation-leading Paid Family and Medical Leave law, which I championed in the past, as well as the good paying jobs our economy continues to create.



But we know our high rankings don't tell the whole story, and don't speak for everyone in the state. That includes me and my family. Being a working mother of two, I intimately know the difficulties of balancing the budget, especially with rising gas and grocery prices. I also know that despite our past successes, there is so much more work to be done to support Washington families who are feeling the burden of the cost-of-living crisis. Rest assured, I'm in this fight every day to ensure our hardworking families not only survive but thrive.

This session, I introduced a Seniors' Independent Living Bill of Rights bill to enhance the quality of life for seniors in Washington by improving standards in senior independent living facilities (**HB 2275**). While the measure did not pass, it would have established minimum rights for residents and convened a technical advisory group to recommend amendments to building codes, prioritizing the well-being of our seniors but also contributing to the economy by fostering a sense of security and stability for retirees, encouraging them to remain active members of our communities.

Additionally, I was proud to partner with my former seatmate and current State Treasurer Mike Pellicciotti to introduce the Washington Saves program (**HB 2244**), designed to improve retirement security for Washingtonians by establishing automatic enrollment individual retirement savings accounts. By creating a state-facilitated retirement savings option, this new law empowers workers to save for their future, particularly those employed by small businesses that may not offer traditional retirement plans. By promoting financial stability among our neighbors, the Washington Saves program contributes to a more resilient economy, reducing reliance on public assistance programs and supporting overall economic well-being. Ultimately, the Senate companion to my bill passed!

Other policies that were successful this year and will help support Washington families' finances include a new law making critical improvements to the Working Families Tax Credit program (**HB 1895**), capping costs of inhalers and epinephrine (**HB 1979**), increasing access to Washington's long-term care benefit (**HB 2467**), expanding the time limit exemptions for cash assistance programs through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program (TANF), increasing the grant amount for Diversion Cash Assistance (**HB 2415**), expanding access to paid sick leave (**SB**

5793), streamlining eligibility for families to access critical child care and preschool programs, such as the Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) and Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP), if they receive basic food assistance, and more.

Budget investments that will help support our economy and address affordability for Washington's working families include \$115 million for early learning and high-quality child care, \$230 million for homelessness and housing programs and services, \$127.5 million for the Housing Trust Fund to build affordable housing, \$64 million for food assistance, and \$5 million to reduce wait times at economic services offices.

EDUCATION THAT WORKS FOR EVERYONE

My personal journey, marked by overcoming childhood adversity and poverty, was made possible by the dedication of teachers and the support of a quality public school system. I firmly believe that every student deserves access to a quality public school in their community and educators who can afford to live where they teach, and my goal is to ensure that the next generation is prepared for success.

We've achieved significant milestones in K-12 education, including the largest teacher salary increases in the nation. Moreover, we've successfully connected thousands of Washington students with apprenticeships and on-the-job training opportunities, broadening their horizons and enhancing their educational experience.

However, one of the ongoing challenges we face is ensuring adequate funding for K-12 education. It's important to emphasize that despite reported shortfalls in every school district, we have not made any cuts. In fact, after hearing from our school districts that the decline in enrollment and cost inflation are straining their budgets, we increased funding for maintenance, supplies, and operating costs in the state prototypical school funding formula (**HB 2494**). We also raised the funding cap for special education (**HB 2180**) and increased funding for school transportation, nurses and counselors, and free school meals. Overall, the 2024 supplemental operating budget invests an additional \$335 million in our K-12 public schools.

Despite these investments, we need to continue to pass policies and fund investments that will help ensure Washington students receive a high-quality education. This session, I introduced two policies to help address challenges facing our schools: staff compensation and climate resiliency.

The School Staff Compensation Equity Act (**HB 2148**) addresses the need for a comprehensive analysis of public school staff



2024 LEGISLATIVE WRAP-UP

compensation to ensure fair and competitive wages. Recognizing the significance of maintaining adequate salary allocations to attract and retain qualified personnel for Washington's education program, the legislation proposes conducting a comparative wage analysis. I introduced this legislation in an effort to find an alternative school funding formula solution that seeks to address the disparities our school districts in the South Sound face under the current "regionalization factor" formula.

The Climate-Resilient Schools Act is a direct response to the outreach of dozens of educators in our school districts this past spring and fall and seeks to address the pressing issue of rising temperatures impacting school facilities due to climate change. Recognizing the immediate need for action, the legislation aims to mitigate the adverse effects of increased temperatures on students' learning environments. These standards would prioritize the well-being of both students and educators, ensuring comfortable and conducive learning environments despite rising temperatures.

While neither measure passed this year, I am committed to championing our public schools and will continue to advocate for policies and investments that will help ensure that every student has the opportunity to receive an excellent education.



ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP AND CLIMATE CHANGE

The challenge of climate change defines our generation and poses threats to our economy and our way of life. As a working mom, I grapple daily with the future my children will inherit in a world impacted by climate change.

I'm proud of Washington state's bold leadership in combating this crisis. We've made strides with the establishment of the Clean Energy Fund, a \$6 billion wind industry, legislation transitioning us to 100% clean energy, and much more. However, there is always more to do to protect our environment, our health, and our state's future. Addressing climate change and investing in our environment isn't just about protecting ourselves from the increasing threats of climate-caused natural disasters, it's also about seizing the economic opportunity to become a leader in clean energy jobs and the next generation of economic innovation.

This session, Washington state continued its leadership in addressing climate change and mitigating its harmful effects on our communities. We took a big step to protect our children's health and promote clean air with legislation advancing the adoption of zero-emission school buses throughout Washington, prioritizing districts in communities disproportionately affected by pollution (**HB 1368**). We also made sure that as more and more of our state makes the transition to clean electricity from natural gas, we aren't leaving folks behind that have to take on the cost burden of that shift. Our decarbonization bill (**HB 1589**) gives Puget Sound Energy – the state's largest utility – the tools to manage the clean energy transition, so it doesn't disproportionately impact Washington's low-income families. That's something Democrats went to the mat for this session, because that transition is happening with or without this legislation, as more and more Washington homes and businesses switch to energy-efficient electric heat pumps. Leaving behind households that are least able to pay for it was something that we were not willing to do, and together we stood strong to get this bill all the way to the finish line.

In addition to supporting these measures, I sponsored multiple policies this session to address climate resiliency and our transition to a clean energy future:

- The Children's Social Equity Land Trust Act (**HB 2243**) focuses on climate resilience and equity. By authorizing the acquisition and management of forested lands, the bill would not only safeguard ecosystems but also generate revenue directed towards childcare grants. While it was ultimately unsuccessful this session, this dual-purpose legislation would address both the environmental and childcare crises, ensuring the well-being of both the planet and its people.

