



May 2020

## 2020 Legislative Session Report

Dear friends and neighbors,

The coronavirus pandemic has brought dramatic change to our daily lives and it's been challenging for everybody, but following the Stay Home, Stay Healthy order really is working. The [Department of Health](#) reports a continued decrease in confirmed cases and deaths. I am grateful and proud of our community for staying the course to make a difference, which prompted the governor to roll out a [phased approach](#) to minimize the risk of contagion as we safely open up the state so we can go back to our normal lives.

I recently mailed a print newsletter to constituent households across the 49<sup>th</sup> district. If you did not receive it, or if you'd rather read it online, you can access it [here](#). While that newsletter included some of our accomplishments, due to size restrictions I was unable to cover other great policy passed in Olympia this session. In this special report you'll find our COVID-19 response, as well as some other bills in areas that support tax reform, equitable government, health care, public safety, and support for children, families and our workforce. There's also information on the supplemental budgets with links where you can explore detailed data and specific projects funded.

This pandemic has affected all of us in major ways. Please don't hesitate to contact me if there is anything I can do to help you manage the current situation. I will do my best to get you the answers and support you need.

Stay healthy,

**REP. SHARON WYLIE**  
**49TH LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT**



## COVID-19 Response

*ENSURING RESOURCES AS WE ALL FACE THIS CRISIS TOGETHER*

### **The Legislature's COVID-19 Response: [HB 2965](#)**

Public health has been underfunded since the Great Recession. This year we allocated new funding to help get local public health agencies in a better place to serve their communities. Then COVID-19 swept across Washington. Democrats collaborated with Republicans for a bipartisan bill to take \$200 million from the Rainy-Day Fund and \$25 million in federal funds to inject a massive amount of money into local and state public health agencies, DSHS, and other agencies to ramp up testing, hire nurses, and assist businesses struggling with layoffs.



### **Increasing Shared Leave Flexibility: [HB 2739](#)**

When people get sick, they should be able to take time off work to recover and get healthy. This legislation provides flexibility for the use of shared leave, including shared leave use for COVID-19 infection or exposure.

### **Maintaining Healthcare Coverage for Educators: [SB 6189](#)**

During the COVID-19 crisis, when schools were shut down, the Legislature saw to it that school employees would maintain health insurance eligibility for the remainder of the school year, even if the employees would otherwise lose eligibility due to a school closure or changes in school operations. This way, all school employees who had insurance prior to this emergency, including hourly employees, will maintain that coverage.

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## Taxes and Revenue

*EQUITABLE, FAIR TREATMENT FOR TAXPAYERS*

### **Simplifying the Administration of the Senior Property Tax Exemption Program: [SB 6319](#)**

Recent changes to the senior property tax exemption have greatly expanded eligibility, but the provisions of the program have made administration difficult. Given the increase in applicants, it's no longer viable for county assessors or their deputies to witness each person signing the application. This bill streamlines the administration of the property tax exemption program by allowing taxpayers to apply online under oath and reinstating the six-month residency requirement, thereby reducing the administrative burden on county assessors.



**Exempting Feminine Hygiene Products from Sales Tax: [SB 5147](#)**

This bill has been introduced several times over the years, in fact, I sponsored the 2017 version. This session I was glad to finally see it reach the governor's desk because women pay hundreds of dollars in sales tax on the purchase of feminine hygiene products over the course of their lifetime. This tax unfairly burdens half of the population in Washington, especially low-income women. These products are considered medically necessary so, as most products under that category, they should also be tax exempt. This bill ensures women can access products that are deemed essential to participate in society without disproportionately burdening them.

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## Equitable & Effective Government

*SUPPORTING OPEN, ACCOUNTABLE, EQUITABLE, AND EFFICIENT GOVERNMENT*

**PERS 1/TRS 1 one-time 3 percent COLA: [HB 1390](#)**

Retired teachers, corrections officers, and other public workers in the PERS 1/TRS 1 system have not seen a permanent cost of living adjustment in their retirement for years due to state budget cuts. Thanks to this new law, a one-time three percent increase is on its way, starting July 1, 2020.

**Protecting Washington's Election Security System: [HB 1251](#)**

With this new law, we'll protect Washington's election security system from cyber-attacks and prepare state and local officials for possible election interference. The Secretary of State, the Attorney General and Chief Information Officer will consult with county auditors to identify instances of security breaches in election systems and determine whether their sources are foreign or domestic entities. The Secretary of State will also report the occurrence of security breaches to the Legislature and provide recommendations for improvement.



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## Supported Kids and Families

*EVERYONE DESERVES THE CHANCE TO LIVE A STABLE, SAFE, AND FULFILLING LIFE*

**Identicards for Homeless Youth: [HB 2607](#)**

This legislation creates a streamlined process for youth experiencing homelessness to obtain reduced-cost identicards. This is critical to helping our most vulnerable young people complete their education, access stabilizing services, and apply for housing and jobs.

**Supporting Child Sex Trafficking Victims: [HB 1775](#)**

This new law recognizes that children are children and eliminates the crime of prostitution for children under the age of 18. It establishes receiving centers and liaisons with the Department of Children, Youth, and Families to provide much needed services and supports to commercially sexually exploited and trafficked children who need help recovering from sexual trauma, abuse, and substance use disorder.

**Restoring Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF): [HB 2441](#), [SB 6478](#)**

Together, these bills lift several recession-era restrictions on TANF to help families afford the basics during a crisis. Their effect gives parents a two-month grace period to come into compliance with program requirements and allows the child’s portion of the grant to continue for an additional 10 months as the caregiver works to stabilize, rather than eliminating the grant entirely. This will ensure that families are not kicked off of cash assistance if they are experiencing homelessness when they hit their 60-month cap. DSHS will report data identifying the race of those whose TANF benefits were reduced or terminated in the last year due to the time limit or sanctions; this is intended to address inequities for families of color, who have been [disproportionately penalized](#) by harsh restrictions.

**Safe and Secure Communities**

*ENSURING EQUAL JUSTICE, PROTECTING PUBLIC SAFETY*

**The Nikki Kuhnhausen Act, Victim Identity Defenses: [HB 1687](#)**

Named after Nikki Kuhnhausen, who was murdered in Vancouver last year, this bill prohibits the use of victim identity or “trans panic” defenses in Washington. A victim identity defense allows a defendant to argue that learning someone’s sexual or gender identity caused them to panic and, as a result, they are less culpable for their actions. It has been used in other states to lessen the sentence of men who have murdered trans women and gay men. Bigotry and bias should never be an excuse for violence or murder. Our court system should play no role in legitimizing hate.



**Protecting Sexual Assault Survivors: [HB 2318](#), [SB 6158](#)**

Obtaining justice after a sexual assault can be a traumatizing and complicated process. This year, the Legislature passed a pair of laws aimed at making it easier for survivors to report and seek justice when they are sexually assaulted. HB 2318 requires law enforcement agencies to preserve the sexual assault kit and evidence from a potential sexual assault, even if the survivor ultimately chooses not to report at that time. SB 6158 directs the Office of the Attorney General to create a model protocol for hospitals and medical clinics to use when treating sexual assault survivors.

These are often extremely difficult cases and survivors should be given the space they need to decide if pursuing prosecution is right for them. Those that do go to a hospital should be treated with compassion and competence. Too often we hear about a hospital creating more trauma for a survivor of sexual assault. These laws will require a baseline protocol and guarantee that survivors will always have the ability to seek justice.

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## Healthy Communities, Healthy Families

### SECURING ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE HEALTH CARE

#### **Limiting Out-of-Pocket Expenses for Insulin: [SB 6087](#)**

Access to insulin is a matter of life and death, and the price of this life-saving medication has tripled in the last three years. The cost of insulin should no longer prevent people from taking it as prescribed. With this bill, a 30-day insulin supply cannot exceed \$100.



#### **Establishing Health Care Cost Transparency Board: [HB 2457](#)**

Health care costs leave too many people in Washington struggling to maintain both their health and finances. The Health Care Cost Transparency Board will annually calculate total health care spending and establish a benchmark for growth in our state. The Board will help us figure out where the money is going in our longer-term solution to make sure that we are spending in the right places.

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## Working Families

### RAISING WORKPLACE STANDARDS AND BUILDING THRIVING COMMUNITIES

#### **Supporting Working Mothers: [HB 2266](#)**

Because breast milk is food that should not be prepared in a bathroom, last year we passed a bill that added expressing milk to laws requiring reasonable accommodations. This year's bill de-links the requirement to provide written certification from a health care provider. With this new law, we're eliminating barriers for working mothers to breastfeed or express milk in a private, clean space that is free from intrusion.



**Commissions Earned, Commissions Paid: [HB 2474](#)**

This bill ensures that workers get paid earned commissions and bonuses regardless of whether they're still with the company or have moved on. Failure to do so is a wage payment violation

**Establishing Minimum Crew Size on Certain Trains: [HB 1841](#)**

We're making public safety a priority with this bill that establishes minimum crew size requirements on freight and passenger trains to effectively respond to emergencies. It also authorizes the Utilities and Transportation Commission to issue monetary penalties for violations and require higher crew minimums for high-risk railroad carriers. The bill had an emergency clause, which was vetoed by the governor.



## 2020 Supplemental Budgets

### OPERATING

The governor vetoes ([click here for the governor's veto message](#)) were extraordinary but necessary measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and help address the sudden and dramatic change to our state's fiscal situation. There's no denying they will have a substantial impact on Washington's economy and state revenues.

Even after the vetoes, however, this budget remained focused on protecting our most vulnerable Washingtonians and on the state's emergent needs. **Highlights include:**

- **Housing & Homelessness** - Increasing shelter capacity, keeping existing affordable housing units affordable, and building and maintaining affordable housing across the state.
- **Early Childhood Development & Child Care** - Taking steps to maintain access to childcare for families and support our childcare providers.
- **K-12 Education** - Increasing funding for pupil transportation, maintaining flexible local effort assistance dollars for districts with increasing property values, and planning for increases in future special education costs.
- **College & Workforce Development** - Following the 2019-21 biennial budget's historic investments in higher education, this year we are matching scholarship dollars for the Opportunity & Rural Jobs scholarship programs and expanding the Job Skills training program.

- **Children, Youth & Families** - Improving services for children and youth in foster care, addressing a shortfall in federal funds for child welfare services, and investing additional dollars necessary to keep youth sentenced in adult court in juvenile rehabilitation until age 25.
- **Human Services** - To prevent many families experiencing poverty from losing critical support when they need it most, this budget funds legislation to address Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program time limits, non-compliance sanctions, as well as to ensure TANF families retain child support payments.
- **Health Care** - Investing in public health, preserving health care access in rural communities, and helping our hospitals serve the highest need patients by supporting transitioning difficult-to-discharge patients to community settings.
- **Behavioral Health** - Providing additional resources to local behavioral health entities for non-Medicaid services like crisis intervention, shoring up our state hospital operations and staffing, and beginning a pilot for supporting children in need of more intensive behavioral health services.
- **Long-Term Care** - Investing in nursing home Medicaid rates at a critical time, improving rates for supported living providers facing higher costs, and enhancing funding for the transition to a consumer-directed employer program for individual providers.
- **Corrections & Public Safety** - Reforming our state's community supervision program and investing in improving opportunities for previously incarcerated individuals to successfully transition upon reentry. Additionally, we provided needed staff and health care resources for our state prisons and invested in training for our local law enforcement partners.
- **Natural Resources** - Providing ongoing support to stabilize the Department of Fish & Wildlife without fee increases, increasing funding for wildfire suppression at the Department of Natural Resources, and investing in supporting recreation in our beautiful state parks.

[Click here](#) for Supplemental Operating Budget graphics, reports and documents.



## TRANSPORTATION

We worked with Gov. Inslee to craft a Supplemental Transportation Budget that dealt with the aftermath of Initiative 976, which cut state transportation revenue by almost half a billion dollars. As first vice chair of the House Transportation Committee, I was in the budget-writing team. It took many hours and some compromises, but we met our goal to protect essential services—such as rural mass transit and special needs transportation—from deep cuts. However, the COVID-19 pandemic became an even bigger challenge than I-976.

In the new budget, there's full funding for the green transportation initiatives to move our state toward cleaner, more sustainable ways of moving people and goods. That funding includes \$600,000 for Washington State University to give technical assistance to public agencies making the switch, \$12 million in capital grants to transit agencies, and a sales tax break for new and used electric vehicles.



Unfortunately, many of the construction, maintenance and preservation projects funded in this budget are on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

[Click here](#) for Supplemental Transportation Budget graphics, reports, project maps and documents.

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## CAPITAL

The 2020 Supplemental Capital Budget invests \$175 million in construction projects, of which \$89 million is financed with state general obligation bonds. It includes \$13 million in authorizations for agencies and higher education institutions to enter into alternative financing contracts. This budget also makes strong investments in housing, shelter, environmental cleanup and school construction.

[Click here](#) for Supplemental Capital Budget graphics, reports, project maps and documents.