

29th Legislative District 2022 LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

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Finance

Rules

Rural Development,
Agriculture & Natural Resources



REPRESENTATIVE MELANIE MORGAN Your Legislature At Work

Dear friends and neighbors,

The 2022 Legislative Session has officially come to an end. It was another robust predominately virtual session. The pandemic did not stop the House of Representatives from passing legislation and budgets that continue to put people first.

I am proud that our work prioritized you and our community, which included racial equity and justice, addressing climate change, strengthening the economic well-being of families, and improving Washington programs and services to better serve you.

As your State Representative, I continue to be your voice at "the table." I do so by fighting the good fight of equity. Ensuring that our district receives the resources and policies that provide safety and self-sufficiency includes:

- \$200,000 to study the benefits of incorporating Pierce County unincorporated communities, including Fredrickson, Midland, North Clover Creek, Collins, Parkland, Spanaway, Summit-Waller, and Summit View into a single city, as reported by the News Tribune on March 11, "Pierce County talks of investing 'dumping ground.' Would forming city there be better?"
- \$135,000 to provide sexual assault prevention programming to middle and high school students in the Tacoma Public Schools. That specifically empowers our teens to recognize the signs of human trafficking. In the next session, I will be seeking additional funding to expand this program to other school districts.
- \$200 million for the community reinvestment account to address economic development, legal aid, reentry services, and violence prevention and intervention. This was recently reported on in Crosscut on February 3, "WA cannabis revenue could go to communities hurt by war on drugs."
- HB 1617-Aligning state and school holidays. This is a trailer bill to HB 1016 making Juneteenth a state legal holiday. This bill clarifies that Juneteenth is a school holiday on which school may not be taught. The News Tribune covered the need for this bill on November 24, 2011, in an article titled "Juneteenth will be a day off for many next year. Why doesn't the law apply to WA schools?"
- HB 1210-Replacing the term "marijuana" with the term "cannabis" throughout the Revised Code of Washington. This is the longest bill I have ever introduced-264 pages. Some say that this is a trivial bill, as it is only about a "word." The word "marijuana" has a long racist history of demonizing Black/Brown people. Not too long ago "the N word" was the term to stop using. We must continue to work toward inclusivity and, by ending the use of another racist word, we can move toward a better Washington together.
- Viewing my voting record (found here: <https://bit.ly/3E50IVv>) shows that I supported legislation from climate-friendly housing policies and reducing carbon emissions to helping cities plan for climate change and expanding access to electric vehicle charging stations.

There is more work to be done. I look forward to completing our work in the House of Representatives in 2023.

And with that we close another session that helps our district thrive and collaborate on projects that make a difference for the 29th. Please continue to stay safe and reach out to my office if you have any questions, or concerns. It is an honor to represent you.

Rep. Melanie Morgan



**EDUCATION
BILLS AND
BUDGET**

As a former school board director, I know how critical it is that our K-12 schools are fully funded, fully staffed, and able to give our children the education they deserve.

We are continuing to deal with the health and economic impacts of the pandemic in the Legislature. I want to recognize our teachers and staff for working so hard for our kids, keeping them safe and learning during the pandemic. I know that the job has been hard these last two years and that is why I am happy that our operating budget included an additional \$360 million to fund schools and school buses, \$236 million in salary increases to keep teacher pay up with inflation, and \$91 million for counselors, nurses, psychologists, and social workers in schools. Additionally, local and state health officials will continue to work with our schools and Office of the Superintendent for Public Instruction to provide teachers and administrators the best guidance to remaining safe and healthy in the classroom.

I am proud to have supported a budget that invests in our kids and schools. The state budget funds more counselors, nurses, psychologists, and social workers to help our students navigate through this tough time, more funding for buses and school lunches, and it covers inflation-related costs.

**AFFORDABLE INSULIN AND
IMPROVED CHARITY CARE**

The Legislature made significant progress in making health care more affordable for specific groups of people who often struggle to pay for care they need.

Washington hospitals now offer a program called charity care which is a free or reduced cost for individuals who are experiencing financial challenges. Many who declare bankruptcy cite their medical debt as a cause.

I voted for HB 1616 which sets the eligibility for charity care the same statewide at 400 percent of the federal poverty level and will expand access to 2.2 million Washington residents. This commonsense approach will not be a burden on taxpayers. This law will make our charity care law better for those who need it.

Another commonsense bill we passed is SB 5546, which addresses insulin affordability. In 2020, we passed a law that capped the cost of insulin at \$100 per month. That is set to expire next year. Insulin is a lifesaving, necessary drug and pharmaceutical companies have been charging outrageous prices for years. SB 5546 sets the new cap to \$35 per month, a much more affordable rate for diabetics in need of insulin. This expires in 2024, so we must keep working to make this permanent



Photo from 2020 prior to pandemic masking and social distancing recommendations

**Building Affordable and Accessible
Housing and Community Services**

Housing affordability continues to be a top concern of constituents and with the pandemic affecting many families, it was important to me that the state continue providing rental assistance. In the budget, we funded an additional \$50 million on top of last year's nearly \$1 billion in rental assistance so that people won't lose their homes.

In our 21-23 capital budget, I secured \$1,500,000 for a new Parkland/Spanaway homeless shelter. Despite best efforts, we are still looking for an appropriate location to build. I will continue to push to find the right location that meets our community needs.

We also have \$1,000,000 in funds for a new community center that will provide resources to the Parkland/Spanaway communities, which are chronically underserved currently. That site has also not been selected, but we are still looking.

A STRONG SAFETY NET

Having a strong safety net means also ensuring that people don't go hungry when they are struggling to make ends meet. I met with a variety of community members this past session to address the need to feed those who are experiencing food insecurity.

We passed SB 5785 to expand our state Transitional Food Assistance program, which offers state aid to purchase food for households even when their federal benefits run out. To keep food assistance program strong, the state budget offers an additional \$94 million this year to help families in need and expands on our Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) hardship exemption. These three steps combined should help families who are faced with the challenges of paying rent or the mortgage and putting food on the table.

But there needs to be more done, especially for our seniors. I am happy that we were able to address some of their needs through SB 5676 to offer a one-time three percent benefit increase for those retired public workers on the PERS 1/TRS 1 plan. And the state budget more than doubled the benefit for the Aged, Blind, and Disabled grant, raising it from \$197 a month to \$417 a month.



MOVE AHEAD WA: TRANSPORTATION FOR THE 29TH DISTRICT

Addressing climate change means tackling one of our biggest sources of pollution and greenhouse gas: Transportation. One of the biggest issues I hear from my constituents is the lack of public transit in our area. Last year, I secured \$1,000,000 in the state Transportation Budget to study the need for additional connectivity between SR 161, SR 7, SR 507, and I-5 in South Pierce County. I look forward to sharing the results of that study and discussing options for improving transit in our communities.

We also passed a new transportation plan called Move Ahead WA which is the greenest transportation package approved by the Legislature. For our district and surrounding area, we have a lot to look forward to from last year's transportation budget and Move Ahead WA, including:

- Pierce Transit Bus Rapid Transit Corridor Improvements and bus rapid transit stations to improve the transit experience with up to 13 new bus rapid transit stations on the SR7/Pacific Avenue corridor with new benches, boarding platforms, weather protection, and more.
- I-5 and JBLM corridor and HOV lane improvements to encourage carpooling and fewer cars clogged in traffic.
- Electric bus charging infrastructure for Pierce Transit to build and relocate electric charging stations to better serve bus routes in the 29th district with electric buses.

