

48TH LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT 2020 LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

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REPRESENTATIVE AMY WALEN

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Dear friends and neighbors,

We are living in unprecedented and uncertain times. What remains constant is my commitment to our community and ensuring the safety and wellbeing of the people of our state. As we wrapped up the legislative session, we transferred \$200 million from the state's Budget Stabilization Account to help respond to the outbreak of COVID-19. My office is here as a resource for you and your family. We do not have all the answers, and if we can't help you directly, we can often connect you with people who can.

Amidst the beginning of the coronavirus outbreak, the Legislature adjourned on-time with a balanced supplemental budget. I am pleased to share this end-of-year report with you on some of the issues I worked on in Olympia – including support for working families, funding for affordable housing and homelessness, and resources for preventing gun violence.

I want to hear from you about what I should prioritize during the 2021 legislative session. I value your perspective and appreciate thoughtful engagement on these critical issues.

Please take care of yourselves and each other during this difficult time for our community and let me know if I can ever be of assistance.

Sincerely,



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AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS



The lack of affordable housing in our community was one of my top priorities when you sent me to Olympia. Our communities are not complete if we do not provide people with affordable places to live. I am proud to have passed four bills in my first term as State Representative that address affordable housing:

- House Bill 1219 passed last session and authorizes cities and counties to use existing real estate excise tax revenue (also known as REET II) to support affordable housing and homelessness projects.
- House Bill 1377 also passed last session and allows an increased density bonus for affordable housing development on property owned or controlled by a religious organization.
- House Bill 2634 allows nonprofit organizations that are providing emergency housing to purchase or receive additional property without the burden of paying the real estate excise tax.
- Senate Bill 6231 provides a limited property tax exemption for the construction of an accessory dwelling unit.



I believe these bills will increase the availability of affordable housing and create more housing choices for our community.

PREVENTING GUN VIOLENCE

Gun violence is a public health crisis and I was proud to support Senate Bill 6288, which will establish the Office of Firearm Safety and Violence Prevention. Washington will be the first state in the nation with a dedicated office to collect statewide data on firearm violence, create intervention and prevention strategies, support victims of gun violence, and fund innovative prevention programs in local communities. I supported a number of bills that would reduce gun violence, including sponsoring House Bill 2519, which would have prevented dangerous individuals from acquiring ammunition and House Bill 2623, which would have prohibited the possession of a firearm for people who have been convicted of unlawful discharge of a firearm or animal cruelty. I remain committed to protecting our community and will continue to advocate for policies that work to end preventable gun violence.

SUPPORTING WORKING FAMILIES

I am extremely concerned about the cycle of debt that burdens many in our communities. Debt is often sold and resold, and collection activity takes place years after the debt was incurred. Last session, I sponsored a consumer protection bill (House Bill 1730) that ensures that debt collection cannot continue after the statute of limitations has expired. This session, I built upon that legislation and passed a bipartisan bill (House Bill 2476) to provide more transparency around debt collection practices from companies which buy and sell debt at discounted rates. When people fall into debt, they should be supported in paying back that debt without sacrificing basic needs. Washington now has one of the strongest consumer protections policies regulating the debt buying industry in the nation.



SUPPLEMENTAL STATE BUDGET

Our investments should build our resilience as a state, in our economy, in our communities, and for our families. This supplemental state budget begins that work, providing a safety net and some of the support we will need to get through the current public health crisis. The budget not only addresses emerging needs, it also invests in priorities including affordable housing and behavioral health services.

Here are a few highlights that I am particularly proud of:

- We are addressing the homelessness and housing affordability crisis by investing in a variety of housing solutions, including a transfer from the state's General Fund to the Housing Trust Fund and investing in a new fund for Permanent Supportive Housing operations.

- We are making critical investments into our behavioral health system to help families in crisis, including funding for state hospital staffing and operations, and additional funding for non-Medicaid services and increased behavioral health provider rates.
- We are honoring our promise to retired public servants in our state's PERS/TRS 1 retirement system by funding a three percent cost-of-living adjustment (COLA), so that individuals who spent their careers taking care of our communities may continue to stay in the communities they helped serve.

