

# 28<sup>TH</sup> LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT 2020 LEGISLATIVE UPDATE



REPRESENTATIVE  
**MARI  
LEAVITT**

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## Committees

*Vice Chair*, College &  
Workforce Development

Capital Budget

Housing, Community  
Development & Veterans

Joint Committee  
on Veterans' &  
Military Affairs

Washington State  
Task Force Against the  
Trafficking of Persons



## Dear Neighbors,

Thank you for taking the time to read my 2020 Legislative Session wrap-up newsletter. COVID-19 changed how we did things in Olympia this year, but we still passed good legislation that will benefit our communities in the long term.

Like every state, we had to determine how best to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Legislature passed a bipartisan authorization I co-sponsored to transfer **\$200 million from the state rainy day fund to support medical providers, public health departments, businesses, and workers affected by the outbreak**. We also chose to keep a healthy reserve and strong "rainy day" fund, totaling about \$3 billion combined in case of economic impact that requires revising our budget.

With federal action and state agencies focused on providing Washington families resources during the pandemic, I want to make sure you have access to information. Below are websites with information on the COVID-19 virus, best practices for staying healthy, information on unemployment assistance and funds for small businesses, and more:

- The state COVID-19 site: <https://coronavirus.wa.gov/>
- Washington Department of Health COVID-19 information page: <https://www.doh.wa.gov/Emergencies/Coronavirus>
- Layoff assistance for workers and businesses: <https://esd.wa.gov/newsroom/layoff-assistance>
- Financial resources for all Washington residents: <https://dfi.wa.gov/coronavirus/financial-resources>

We also passed supplemental budgets that made critical investments in our region and across the state, including:

- Respect for our public workers by providing a **3 percent cost of living increase for PERS 1/ TRS 1 retirees**, authorized in House Bill 1390, which I sponsored;
- **Targeted investments in emergency shelters and affordable housing** with a new \$160 million funding boost;
- **An increase to Medicaid primary care rates**, support for rural health clinics, and increased funding for foundational public health; and
- Restarting and maintaining **critical transportation projects important to our local communities**.

Despite challenges, the budgets required **NO increase in gas, state property tax rates, or sales tax rates**.

There is always a possibility the governor will call the Legislature back to a special session to address emerging needs due to COVID-19. In the 2021 Legislative Session, we also will face challenges as we seek ways to maintain our health care infrastructure and keep it affordable, help businesses recover after weeks or months of disruption, and expand job opportunities for working and middle class families.

I want to thank our essential workers, the healthcare workers and providers, first responders, grocery store workers, truckers, child care providers, and so many others who are sacrificing time with their families and their own health so that supply chains and essential services are available to us all.

No matter when the next Legislative Session occurs, I will continue advocating for you. It is my honor to serve as your State Representative.

We will get through this together,

*Mari Leavitt*

# PROTECTING OUR COMMUNITIES

Protecting the public is a key role of government and something I think of every day in Olympia. There are a lot of ways we think of public safety: fire departments, police officers, corrections officers. Our healthcare workers, particularly those in behavioral health, are also part of the frontline defense to keep communities safe.

I passed House Bill 2189 to address a legal loophole that excludes some workers at Western State Hospital who should qualify for early retirement. When you're doing the dangerous work of Competency Restoration, risk of physical assault by patients is real, and these workers should qualify for early retirement.

Ensuring our law enforcement has the resources and training they need is a top priority for me. I co-sponsored several bills that increased the number of law enforcement classes and improved training. Those bills did not pass but there is funding in the budgets to increase de-escalation training, add more Basic Law Enforcement Academy classes, and improve and build new facilities to train our recruits.



Finally, I introduced House Bill 2287 to mandate that the Joint Transportation Committee study the National Transportation Safety Board's recommendations after the 2017 accident in DuPont, along with other states' rail safety best practices, and Washington's rail safety practices. We must ensure that an accident like the one in DuPont never happens again. The policy bill did not pass, but the bill language and study is included and funded in the final budget so that we can ensure our railways are safe.

## STANDING WITH MILITARY FAMILIES

Many of our veterans and military families face obstacles average families don't have to worry about. That's why I worked with my colleagues to pass House Bill 2188, which helps many veterans who have the federal qualifications for a commercial driver's license (CDL) but have not gone through the state Department of Licensing (DOL) process. That process includes an instruction course and a knowledge and skills test and since many veterans have met federal requirements, those steps are unnecessary. HB 2188 allows DOL to waive the CDL knowledge examination requirements for those veterans who meet the federal requirements.

Another bill I worked on was House Bill 2303, which would remove regulations for military service members and their spouses who have passed qualification exams and licensing requirements in other states for their profession. Often it is the military spouses who have the necessary qualifications in one state but must jump through extra hoops to work in Washington state in order to get the same occupational licensing. My bill would ease that restriction and remove some of those burdens. Unfortunately, that bill did not pass this year, but came very close. I will bring it back next year so that our military families can pursue job opportunities without unnecessarily going through the process of obtaining an occupational license.



*Rep. Leavitt at 2019 bill signing for improved pay for military service members who fight state wildfires.*

Finally, another bill I worked on was merged with a colleague's bill to address in-state resident status for military service members and their families. My bill, House Bill 2185, was combined with my colleague's bill, House Bill 2543, to guarantee in-state resident status so that many of our military service members and their families can attend a Washington university or college and not have to pay out-of-state tuition when they've been stationed out of state.



## HEALTHY FAMILIES, HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

For many in our community and elsewhere, health care is becoming out of reach. One area that is a major concern is the cost of pharmaceutical drugs. One of those drugs is insulin and it has people rationing their supply, putting their health at risk. A bipartisan bill I co-sponsored passed the Legislature this year that addresses those costs and gives people the ability to pay for their medication. House Bill 2662 caps the monthly cost of insulin at \$100, a far more affordable option to families all over our state.

Another bill, Senate Bill 6088, establishes a prescription drug affordability board to monitor drug pricing, conduct cost reviews, and set payment limits. This will help us address the crisis many are facing with health care costs, and make sure we can keep drug prices affordable.



## ADDRESSING AFFORDABLE HOUSING & HOMELESSNESS

Addressing housing and the homelessness crisis in Pierce County is a tall order and cannot be just one solution, which is why I sponsored legislation and funding in the budget to eliminate what is called the "shelter penalty." One example is a practice of not including those people couch surfing, or temporarily staying with friends, as homeless. If a situation is not permanent, those children and their family members should be considered homeless so that they can access the full range of benefits to help them get into stable housing. I have a new bill that will help those families qualify for certain existing benefits that will remove unnecessary barriers to assistance.

The Legislature passed a budget that expanded investments in affordable housing and shelters by nearly \$160 million, funding projects across the state and in Pierce County. That funding is critical to advancing those projects, which are approved for funding through the Housing Trust Fund.

## EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL

In addition to the veteran and military college tuition bills I worked on this year, I helped pass several other good improvements to our postsecondary education system. One is House Bill 1755, which authorizes regional universities to offer applied, but not research, doctorate level degrees in education. This is about fairness for our students outside of Seattle who want to pursue a doctoral degree in order to be able to advance in their career as required, and need to stay close to home to take care of a family member and work in their school communities.

Washington state high school athletes are barred from playing when they show signs of a concussion, which has been law for 12 years. But there is no requirement that head injuries are tracked, meaning we do not always have the data we need to make informed choices and laws. I co-sponsored House Bill 2731 to require the Washington Interscholastic Activities Association to track head injuries and report back to the Department of Health (DOH), which will submit an annual report to the Legislature and state education officials. Our kids deserve to be able to safely play the sports they love.

The cost of college textbooks is a massive burden to families in our state. That's why I co-sponsored a new law, House Bill 1702, that requires community and technical colleges to let students know when a course uses a low-cost resource, like open-sourced textbooks. This could save students, and



their families, a lot of money while pursuing their degree or accreditation.

Running Start is a great program that most people associate with getting a jump on college credits. But it's also an opportunity for high school students interested in pursuing an apprenticeship in the construction trades. That's why I supported Senate Bill 6374, which adds the cost of apprenticeship materials (like occupation-specific tools, work clothes, rain gear, and boots) to the list of appropriate materials that can be covered by the Running Start scholarship.

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28th LD

## SUPPORTING LOCAL PROJECTS

### Construction Budget Projects

Every year, the Legislature looks at projects that benefit the community and tries to help fund them. One project that requested state funding is the Lakebay Marina. The goal is to purchase the property and turn it into a state marine park, ensuring access for locals in this region. It's a valuable project because of how critical tourism and recreation is to the area. I requested \$100,000 from the state capital budget to help fund this purchase agreement.

There's also \$10,000 for Anderson Island Historical Society projects and \$200,000 for the City of Fircrest as they look at replacing older and outdated water meters.



### Transportation Budget Projects

The passage of Initiative 976 presented some funding shortfalls for existing transportation projects, including many in Pierce County. The governor paused many projects while the Legislature sorted out how to find alternative funding. Thankfully, short-term solutions allowed us to restart those projects which are critical to moving freight and workers through the Puget Sound. Those projects include:

- A new lane between Thorne Lane and the Mounts Road Interchange
- \$4 million for DuPont-Steilacoom Road lane construction in both directions

- \$2 million for curb, gutter, sidewalk, and street lighting along Veterans Drive and Vernon Ave for the Lake City Business District
- \$1 million for railroad crossing improvements and train noise mitigation at the 6th avenue/Titlow & South 19th street railroad crossings
- \$1 million for the Titlow Rail Bridge Culvert Improvement for design and permitting to make the project construction ready—a high priority project for salmon recovery efforts.