

2023 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

The COVID pandemic has left lasting scars on communities across Washington. Many of our state's workers, families, and small businesses struggle every day to afford basic needs like housing, health care, and childcare amid rising costs and skyrocketing inflation brought on by corporate consolidation and greed. All the while, the wealthiest individuals and corporations in our state continue to reap record profits.

It is possible to reverse the economic effects of the COVID pandemic and build healthy and resilient communities here in Washington. Stimulus payments and the Child Tax Credit provided vital support to many and reduced child poverty on a national scale. Washington's Paid Family & Medical Leave program, health care for childcare workers, and the Working Families Tax Credit are recent policy wins that help mitigate the growing gap between the rich and poor and address the racism and sexism that has been undermining economic stability for generations. However, this work is not over yet. **Our government must continue to prioritize programs that invest in the public good because they work!**

We can ensure Washington families have the supports and services they need to thrive. Work, health, family, and finances are inextricably linked in our society - we must invest now in critical programs and structures that will begin to right our course, and shrink income and wealth inequality.

AFFORDABLE & ACCESSIBLE HEALTH CARE

Everyone deserves access to quality, affordable, and culturally responsive health care. Reeling in rapidly rising costs and ensuring broad access to quality care is possible - and is especially needed for immigrants, people with lower incomes, and others in marginalized groups.

PRIORITIZING

- **Consumer health price agenda:** Our efforts to improve health care affordability will continue to be stymied until we can regulate wealthy and rapidly consolidating health care entities. Legislative items like controlling prices, regulating mergers and acquisitions, tracking and capping pharmaceutical prices, and putting a stop to anti-competitive health industry contracting practices will all be critical to holding large entities accountable and driving down health care costs for patients and small business owners.
- **Cascade Care Savings Reauthorization:** Building on the success of prior years, we must ensure that our state budget includes ongoing funding to provide health care premium subsidies to lower income people in our state. Without action, these critical subsidies will expire in 2024.

SUPPORTING

- **Health equity for immigrants:** Immigrants in our state are 11 times more likely to lack health insurance than U.S. citizens. Building on the success of prior years, which created a state-funded Medicaid-equivalent program, as well as an Exchange coverage program with subsidies for lower-income immigrants, the Health Equity for Immigrants Campaign now demands a strong budget allocation to fund and implement these programs.
- **Safe health care staffing:** Health care workers struggle to meet patient needs due to unsafe working conditions and dangerous patient loads, leading to burnout and high turnover. Establishing minimum staffing standards, improving rest and meal breaks, and creating overtime provisions are critical to improving worker safety and patient care.

FAIR TAXES THAT PROVIDE AMPLE FUNDING



Washington is home to some of the wealthiest people in the world, and poverty is common in every country across the state. Despite this unacceptable inequality, our outdated and unfair tax code taxes everyday wealth and consumption while leaving the wealth of multi-millionaires and billionaires free to grow untaxed. A just tax system will raise revenue from those with the most wealth, fully fund programs and services that make a difference in our lives and create more opportunities for economic stability.

PRIORITIZING

- **Wealth Tax on Billionaires:** A state wealth tax will close a major loophole in our tax code and will ensure that the very wealthiest, such as our state's 100 or so billionaires, pay more of their fair share so everyone in Washington can thrive. This tax is structured as a property tax on financial property, such as corporate stocks and bonds, of multi-millionaires and billionaires. This policy will bring in billions in progressive revenue per year.
- **Estate Tax Reform:** The estate tax is the most progressive tool in our tax code toolbox. Commonsense reforms will improve the tax to make it fairer. These reforms will be focused on excluding small estates from the tax by raising the threshold to file as well as updating the tax rates such that the very largest estates pay their fair share.

SUPPORTING

- **Working Families Tax Credit:** The Working Families Tax Credit, which will be sending cash to around 400,000 households across Washington state in 2023, helps make our tax code fairer. The coalition that came together to get this policy passed in 2021 will be advocating for expanding the credit to reach more households by expanding the eligible age for receiving the credit to 18.

STABLE AND DIGNIFIED WORK FOR ALL PEOPLE



Every worker deserves job security, living wages, predictable schedules, equitable treatment, and time to care for ourselves and our loved ones. We must strengthen Paid Family & Medical Leave and ensure that essential childcare and healthcare workers have good pay and safe and secure workplaces.

PRIORITIZING

- **Paid Family & Medical Leave sustained and adequate funding:** Washington has been at forefront of historic paid leave legislation. During COVID, paid sick days and paid leave programs gave workers vital economic security and time to heal. The high usage rate of the program demonstrates its necessity for Washington workers. As a result, the program structure is not keeping up with demand. We will support legislation to ensure long-term stability and provide a road map for the program's wellbeing for years to come.
- **Paid Family & Medical Leave Language Access:** This program should be accessible to all workers, yet currently, thousands of non-English speakers do not know about the program or are forced to apply with a paper application delaying approval and payments. We need to create equity for monolingual users by expanding language access through outreach and improvements in the application process.
- **Childcare Compensation:** Childcare workers make poverty wages and often do not receive benefits like health care and retirement plans. Childcare workers are leaving the industry for higher paying jobs and providers struggle to retain and attract qualified teachers. We support increasing the reimbursement rate for working connections and support paying licensed child care programs based on enrollment rather than attendance. These changes can ensure revenue is more predictable and support long-term livable wages for Washington's childcare workforce.

ECONOMIC STABILITY THROUGH MEANINGFUL INVESTMENT



Black, Indigenous, and People of Color have been systematically excluded from building economic stability in many ways from land theft of Indigenous people, to a GI Bill that was created to accommodate Jim Crow laws, to today's immigrants who pay taxes but are prevented from accessing financial safety net programs. BIPOC communities owe disproportionate amounts of debt, such as medical and student loan debt and have less access to cash when they need it.

PRIORITIZING

- **Baby Bonds:** Years of structural and institutional racism have left Black, Indigenous, and People of Color communities from being able to build and sustain family and community wealth. The Washington Future Fund is an investment of \$4,000 for newborn children born under apple health to use upon turning 18 for investments in higher education, opening a business or buying a home. Investments in low-income, predominantly BIPOC communities will begin to address historic inequality and shrink income and wealth disparities in our state.

SUPPORTING

- **Guaranteed Basic Income (GBI):** For many in Washington, having a job isn't enough to make ends meet or weather unexpected expenses. Guaranteed Basic Income is a monthly cash payment for households that meet certain eligibility criteria that can provide a necessary economic cushion and has been successful in other cities in the US as well as a variety of countries worldwide. The proposed expanded pilot program will offer access to cash payments in nine different regions and incentivize data collection to determine the feasibility of a statewide GBI program.
- **Tuition-Free Higher Education:** As state support of public higher education institutions has decreased since the 1980s, the student share has increased to compensate. Student loan debt disproportionately impacts BIPOC students and their families. While the Washington College Grant is a significant support, tuition-free public college would mean more students would be able to graduate college free of debt.
- **Expanded Mental Health and Student Supports in Higher Education:** The coalition that came together to pass and implement a mental health pilot program in Community and Technical Colleges in 2021 will be advocating for an expansion of this program, along with other policies that aim to support first-generation and under historically underserved student populations.

Register for our January 5th legislative kickoff event to hear from our policy team and learn more about our legislative priorities.

bit.ly/2023-E0IKICKOFF