

Capitol News

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WSLHA Priorities

[HB 1222](#), legislation that **mandates large group insurance plan coverage** (employers with more than 50 employees) **for hearing instruments and the services necessary to fit them**, has been pulled from the Rules Committee and is now eligible for a vote in the House.

The Legislature is considering several bills dealing with **special education funding**.

- [HB 1436](#) is OSPI-request legislation. It has passed the House Appropriations Committee and is now in the Rules Committee. It was amended to make changes to the special education cost multipliers and require the Joint Legislative Audit & Review Committee (JLARC) to conduct a performance audit of the state's special education system.
- [SB 5311](#) is Governor-request legislation. It **increases special education cost multipliers** over a 4-year period and increases the funding cap to 15%. It was voted out of the Senate Ways & Means Committee and is now in the Rules Committee. It was amended to remove the phase-in of special education multiplier increases. It was also amended to direct ESDs to contact for independent special education advocates, subject to appropriation.
- [HB 1109](#) increases the **reimbursement for initial evaluations and IEPs** during the summers of 2023, 2023, and 2025. It was voted out of the Appropriations Committee with the following amendments: the first clarifies that the \$3000 for initial evaluations and IEP development are provided per student; the second puts a 'null and void clause' on the bill, making it null and void unless funded in the final operating budget. It is now in the Rules Committee.
- [HB 1305](#) makes several timeline changes to **requirements related to initial student evaluations for special education and to development and implementation of individualized education programs**. It passed the Appropriations Committee with the following amendments:
 - Delays to August 1, 2025, the effective date of provisions related to referral of, and initial evaluation for, special education services.
 - Provides 60, rather than 40, calendar days for school districts to conduct initial special education evaluations that do not meet certain exceptions.

- Adds that school district staff who have knowledge of resources or services available to the student may participate in the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team meeting.
- Strikes requirements that staff who provide a significant level of support to a student on a regular basis must be invited to and compensated for participation in an IEP team meeting.
- Strikes requirements that school districts respond by specified timelines when a parent requests that the district convene an IEP team meeting.
- Strikes requirements that school districts commence provision of special education services within 30 calendar days of the determination that the student is eligible the services.
- Strikes provisions related to the services of the State School for the Blind and the Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Youth.
- Adds a null and void clause, making the bill null and void unless funded in the budget.

[HB 1508](#) is legislation regarding the **Health Care Cost Transparency Board**. This Board was established in 2020 to analyze total health care expenditures in Washington, identify trends in health care cost growth, and establish a health care cost growth benchmark.

HB 1508 allows the Board to require a payer or health care provider to submit a performance improvement plan if it has substantially exceeded the health care cost growth benchmark without reasonable justification or meaningful improvement for two of the previous three years. The bill also authorizes the Board to impose fines on providers who violate data submission requirements or exceed the benchmark without reasonable justification.

The proponents of the bill are targeting hospitals and the larger provider groups, not small providers. As a result, the bill was amended in the House Appropriations Committee on Friday **to exempt any provider composed of 25 or fewer health care professionals from having to submit a performance improvement plan or pay a civil fine for data submission violations or exceeding the health care cost growth benchmark**. It was also amended to require the Health Care Authority, when establishing a civil fine schedule, to account for the relative starting price position of the payer or health care provider in relation to the health care cost growth benchmark, including primary care expenditure goals.

I expect further amendments to this bill as it moves to a vote by the House.

[HB 1565](#) addresses professional education workforce recruitment and retention, including the **Beginning Educator Support Team (BEST)** program. Section 17 of the substitute bill includes educational staff associates (ESAs) in this program. This bill is in the House Rules Committee

The House Appropriations Committee has approved [HB 1479](#) related to restraint and isolation of students. The substitute bill includes the professional development opportunities WSLHA

joined with its fellow education groups in recommending. There is a simultaneous effort to secure funding for this professional development in the operating budget.

General News

During last week's seventh week of session, nearly every legislator in Olympia spent long, arduous days in a fiscal committee, hearing and voting on a tremendous number and variety of bills that have fiscal impact to the state. The week culminated in the fiscal policy cutoff on Friday. However, bills that are designated "necessary to implement the budget" or NTIB, are exempt from Friday's fiscal cutoff calendar.

Next week, both chambers will move to the floor to debate and vote on bills until the House of Origin cutoff on Wednesday, March 8th.