

Capitol News

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WSLHA Priorities

[HB 2180](#), the bill that increases the **K-12 special education enrollment funding** cap, passed the Senate unanimously. It was amended to increase the funding cap to 16%. **It now returns to the House for approval of the Senate amendment.**

[HB 2494](#) is another school funding bill that **increases funding to materials, supplies, and operating costs (MSOC)** for school districts. This includes technology, curriculum, textbooks, library materials, facilities maintenance, and central office administration. HB 2494 was amended in the Senate to clarify that this funding is meant to address growing costs associated with technology, curriculum, textbooks, library materials, facilities maintenance, and central office administration. **It passed the Senate and now returns to the House for approval of Senate amendments.**

[HB 2476](#) creates a covered lives assessment on health care insurers to **increase Medicaid rates** for professional services, to be determined in rule-making by the Health Care Authority. **It did not pass the House Appropriations Committee before the fiscal cutoff deadline and is dead.**

[HB 1508](#), is legislation from last session that seeks to address **the cause of increased health care costs**. This bill directs the state's Health Care Cost Transparency Board to survey underinsurance among Washington residents, along with insurance trends among employers and employees. It also requires the Transparency Board to hold a public hearing each year to discuss the growth in total health care expenditures and identify payers or health care providers whose health care cost growth exceeded the health care cost growth benchmark. Finally, it increases the membership of the Transparency Board's Health Care Stakeholder Advisory Committee by adding members representing the interests of consumers, labor purchasers, and employer purchasers. **HB 1508 passed the Senate and now goes to Governor Inslee for his approval.**

[SB 5241](#) modifies reporting requirements for **mergers, acquisitions, or contracting affiliations** between hospitals, hospital systems, or provider organizations. It requires the Attorney General to determine, through a public process, if the transaction would detrimentally affect the continued existence of accessible, affordable health care in the state for at least ten years after the transaction occurs. This bill was the 5pm bill in the House (see below) and was not brought up for a House vote.

The House Health Care & Wellness Committee held a work session on **network adequacy** on Tuesday. The presentation from the Insurance Commissioner's Office can be found [here](#).

General News

As the 2024 session draws to a close, both chambers spent last Monday in fiscal committees to meet the fiscal committee cutoff deadline. Beginning on Tuesday, legislators spent their time in caucus and on the floor working to pass as many of their priority bills as possible before the clock ran out on Friday at 5pm.

On cut-off days, the 5pm bill in each chamber is the source of great speculation. Both the House and Senate chose highly controversial bills this time. The Senate took up a piece of legislation they had started work on the day prior, HB 1589, the bill that accelerates the transition from natural gas to electricity. After a fiery debate, the bill passed 27-22 with Senators Mullet and Van De Wege joining Republicans in opposition. Across the rotunda, the House took up SB 5241, the "Keep Our Care Act" that would regulate future healthcare mergers with the intent of preserving access to health care services including reproductive care, gender-affirming care, and end-of-life care. Shortly before 5:00pm, the House announced SB 5241 would come up next, they went to caucus, and did not return to the floor.

One significant piece of legislation that did not advance on cut-off day was labor's number one priority, HB 1893, the bill that would have provided unemployment benefits to striking workers. Supporters had said the bill would level the playing field for workers, while detractors claimed the policy would upend the balance between business and labor at the bargaining table. Only three states, New Jersey, New York, and Maine, have allowed striking workers to access jobless benefits.

Another much-watched bill that did not advance was the rent stabilization legislation, HB 2114. The Senate Ways & Means committee did not bring the bill up for a vote, given it did not have the backing of enough Democrats to pass, notably lacking the support of Senators Mullet and Van De Wege. Neither of these moderate Senators will be returning to the Senate next session and thus, a new version of the bill in 2025 may enjoy an easier path if more progressive Democrats are elected in 2024.

Next week, the House and Senate will focus on negotiating the differences in bills that have passed both chambers but in different forms. If a bill has been amended by the opposite house, it must return to the original house to get approval of the amendments. If the original house concurs in the amendments, the bill has passed the Legislature. If the original house disagrees, it can ask the second house to recede from the amendments. If the opposite house recedes, the bill has passed the Legislature.

If the two houses cannot resolve their differences, one of them can ask for a conference committee. In this case, members from each house meet behind closed doors to negotiate a final bill. If they are successful, the conference committee makes a report. Both houses must adopt the conference committee report for the bill to pass the Legislature. Neither chamber is allowed to amend a conference report.

And, of course, all eyes will be on the final negotiated budgets (operating, capital, and transportation) which we will likely see early in the week. Adopting the budgets is typically one of the last acts the Legislature completes before adjourning *Sine Die* (from the Latin meaning “without day”) on Thursday.

In addition to the flurry of floor activity, joint committees met this week to address the three initiatives to the Legislature majority Democrats have chosen to hear. On Tuesday, a joint session of the House Finance and Senate Ways & Means Committees heard public testimony on Initiative 2111. This measure would prohibit state and local jurisdictions from imposing a tax on any individual person on any form of personal income. The bill was voted out of committee on Friday.

Wednesday morning, Initiative 2081 was heard in a joint session of the House Education and Senate Early Learning & K-12 Committees. This measure declares 15 rights that parents and guardians of public school children have, including rights to receive or be notified of academic, medical, safety, and law enforcement matters; rights to access certain materials and records; and rights to opt their children out of certain activities. The bill was voted out of committee on Friday.

Finally, on Wednesday, the Senate Law & Justice and House Community Safety, Justice & Reentry Committees heard public testimony on Initiative 2113. This measure would remove certain restrictions on when peace officers may engage in vehicular pursuits. The bill was voted out of committee on Friday.

The legislator retirement announcements continue to roll out. Representative JT Wilcox announced this week that he will not seek re-election after having served 14 years in the Legislature. Wilcox served as Minority Leader of the House Republican Caucus from 2018-2023.

Upcoming Dates:

March 7 - Last day of Regular Session