

Capitol News

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WSLHA Priorities

[HB 2180](#), the bill that increases the **K-12 special education enrollment funding** cap from 15% to 17.25%, passed the House unanimously and has been referred to the Senate Early Learning & K12 Education Committee. But it has not been scheduled for a hearing yet.

[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. It passed the House and has been scheduled for a hearing in the Senate Early Learning & K12 Education Committee on Monday.

[HB 2476](#) is a health care funding bill that got attention this week. The original bill creates a covered lives assessment on insurers to **increase Medicaid rates** for physicians, physician assistants, and nurse practitioners. However, a [proposed substitute](#) was heard this week in the House Health Care & Wellness Committee. The most significant change is that it directs the Health Care Authority to determine in rulemaking which professional services are included in the rate increase, instead of applying to all professional services delivered only by physicians, physician assistants, and nurse practitioners. It has not been scheduled for a committee vote yet.

[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 was heard and voted out of the Senate Health & Long Term Care Committee on Thursday. It is scheduled for a hearing in the Ways & Means Committee on Tuesday.

Another health care bill from last session has been resurrected. [SB 5241](#) modifies reporting requirements for **mergers, acquisitions, or contracting affiliations** between hospitals, hospital systems, or provider organizations. It also 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 heard in the House Civil Rights & Judiciary Committee on Wednesday and is

scheduled for a vote on Tuesday. There is significant opposition to this bill from hospitals and the Washington State Medical Association. There will likely be amendments to address some of this opposition.

General News

The 2024 Legislative session is now more than two-thirds complete, after having passed the House of Origin cutoff on Tuesday. The vast number of bills introduced during the biennium are dwindling and legislators are now back in committees, considering a smaller set of bills already debated, amended, and passed by the other chamber. Cutoffs continue to come at lightning speed, with the policy committee cutoff looming on February 21st and the fiscal committee cutoff on February 26th.

As floor action wound down earlier this week, the chambers passed some of the more contentious bills of the session regarding firearms dealers, traffic cameras, sentencing modifications, holocaust education, and unemployment insurance for striking workers. Great speculation always exists as to what will be the 5:00 bill in each chamber. Under legislative rules, as long as a bill has been started (and usually paused on cutoff day) prior to the 5:00pm deadline, debate is allowed to go on as long as necessary.

This year, the Senate adjourned at 4:15pm after passing a bill officially bestowing “The Evergreen State” as the state’s nickname. The House, on the other hand, debated HB 2114, the heated rent stabilization bill. The bill prohibits increasing rent more than once in a 12-month period and prohibits increasing rent more than 7% during a 12-month period for month to month and long-term leases. The legislation passed 54-43 with 4 Democrats voting against it. It now heads to the Senate, where it faces an uncertain future.

Each session, budget writers await the mid-session revenue forecast before putting the finishing touches on their budgets. On Wednesday, the forecast showed a “slow growing economy” with revenue projected to increase \$122 million for the 2023-25 biennium and \$215 million for the 2025-27 biennium. Total state revenues are expected to increase 7% between the 2023-25 and 2025-27 biennia. In unexpected news, the Department of Revenue reported an error in the capital gains revenue forecast from last November, leading to a downward adjustment of more than \$200 million for the 2023-25 biennium.

Senate budget writers released their 2024 Supplemental Capital Budget proposal on Thursday. The capital budget funds construction and maintenance of infrastructure and physical projects throughout Washington. This year, the budget includes investments in K-12 school construction, behavioral health treatment facilities, and housing.

We will see the House and Senate operating budgets over the next few days. The Senate will release their budget on Sunday at 4pm, the House on Monday at noon. Both budgets will be heard on Monday afternoon and voted out of committee on Wednesday. The Senate Capital

Budget was heard Thursday and will be voted out of committee on Monday. The House Capital Budget will be released on Monday, heard on Tuesday, and voted out of committee on Friday.

As this week wraps up, most legislators will return home to their districts for the weekend to hear from constituents at town halls, traditionally scheduled for the weekend after the House of Origin cutoff.