

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 Senate Early Learning & K12 Education Committee and is being heard on Saturday in the Senate Ways & Means Committee. However, the final decision on the level of funding lies in the budget, and the House and Senate budgets currently are not aligned. The Senate budget includes funding to move the percentage to 15.6%; the House raises it to 17.25%.

[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 Senate Early Learning & K12 Education Committee and is being heard on Saturday in the Senate Ways & Means Committee.

[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 has not been scheduled for a committee vote yet and is likely 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 was **voted out of the Ways & Means Committee on Friday.**

[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 passed the House Civil Rights & Judiciary Committee and was heard in the House Appropriations Committee today. **It is scheduled for executive session on Monday.**

The House Health Care & Wellness Committee will hold a work session on **network adequacy** on Tuesday.

General News

Wednesday was the cutoff for bills to be voted out of their policy committees in the opposite chamber. Bills with a financial impact to the state must make a quick journey through the fiscal committees, with a deadline of Monday, February 26th. After that, the chambers will return to the floor full-time to debate bills until Friday, March 1st when they will turn attention to final concurrence and passing final budgets until Sine Die on March 7th.

As the end of session nears, several legislators are making plans to leave the Legislature. In response to the impending retirement of Congresswoman Cathy McMorris Rogers, Rep. Jacquelin Maycumber (R-7th) has announced her intention to run for the seat. Rep. Maycumber was first elected to the House in 2017 and serves as the minority floor leader for her caucus.

Rep. Spencer Hutchins (R-26th) has announced he will not seek reelection, noting the part-time legislature has taken a financial toll on his business. This will be an expensive swing race for Gig Harbor and the east side of Kitsap Peninsula. On Tuesday, the Lewis County Board of Commissioners voted to appoint Rep. Joel McEntire's (R-19th) stepdaughter Lillian Hale to temporarily serve as his replacement while he returns to active service in the Marine Corps reserve. This will begin at the end of session. Hale is studying nursing at Lower Columbia College. While not required, it is customary for a family member to fill in for deployed state officials.

And finally, Senator Sam Hunt (D-22nd) has announced his retirement after nearly 24 years in the legislature. Rep. Beth Doglio (D-22nd) has indicated she is not interested in the seat, but Rep. Jessica Bateman (D-22nd) has announced she will seek it.

House Speaker Jinkins and Senate Majority Leader Billig have announced that the House and Senate will hold joint public hearings on February 27th and 28th on three of the six initiatives before the Legislature: I-2113 (police pursuits); I-2111 (state income tax); and I-2081 (parental rights). It's widely speculated that the Legislature will accept these initiatives so they will not go to the ballot in the fall. I-2117 (repeal of the Climate Commitment Act), I-2109 (repeal of the capital gains tax), and I-2124 (opt-out of Washington's long-term care program) will go straight to the ballot.

On Sunday, Senate budget writers released their \$71.7 billion supplemental operating budget. This budget adds nearly \$1.9 billion in new spending to the two-year budget passed by lawmakers in April 2023. It leaves \$4.3 billion in total reserves at the end of the biennium. The proposal highlights include a focus on education (\$242 million) and behavioral health (\$252 million). The Senate passed its budget on Friday with a strong 45-4 bipartisan vote.

The House released its \$72 billion supplemental budget on Monday. Like the Senate budget, it focuses spending on K-12 education (\$254 million), behavioral health (\$320 million), and housing (\$100 million). The House will vote on its budget on Saturday.

Upcoming Dates:

February 26 - Opposite House Fiscal Committee Cutoff

March 1 - Floor Cutoff

March 7 - Last day of Regular Session