Capitol News

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# WSLHA Bills of Interest

* [SB 5848](https://app.leg.wa.gov/billsummary?BillNumber=5848&Initiative=false&Year=2021), the bill that licenses **music therapists**, died in the House Health Care & Wellness Committee.
* [SB 5753](https://app.leg.wa.gov/billsummary?BillNumber=5753&Initiative=false&Year=2021) makes changes to **boards and commissions** at the Department of Health, including the Board of Hearing & Speech (BOHS). This bill increases the compensation for BOHS members and clarifies its definition of a quorum. This bill is now on the House second reading calendar.

# General News

Last week, Majority Democratic budget writers released their supplemental operating budget proposals. Both the House and Senate budgets translate higher-than-expected state tax collections into increased spending on a variety of caucus priorities including healthcare, affordable housing and homelessness, education, the environment, and infrastructure. The House budget proposes increasing the budget to $65 billion, while the Senate budget proposes $63.4 billion. Minority Republicans were quick to criticize, arguing neither budget proposes broad tax cuts.

Both budgets propose:

* Transferring $2 billion from the general fund to Move Ahead Washington, the $16 billion, 16-year transportation package.
* Keeping the state paid family leave program solvent through June 30, 2023. The House spends $397 million, and the Senate spends $350 million.
* Substantial investments in K-12 public schools, with most of the funding going toward stabilizing school enrollment. $315 million in House, and $345 million in Senate. Funding for K-12 proposed by the House and Senate also would include money to fund additional counselors, nurses, and psychologists in schools.
* Providing a 3.25% pay raise for state workers on July 1, per a collective bargaining agreement. Most will also receive a one-time payment of $3,400. The tab for wages and benefits is $232 million in the Senate budget, $276 million in the House’s.
* Assistance for utilities such as broadband, energy, garbage, water, and recycling
* Immediate shelter needs for the state’s homeless population

Both budgets were heard hours after their release before the House Appropriations and Senate Ways and Means committees on Monday. The Senate passed their budget on Friday evening, with the House passing their version on Saturday. House and Senate proposals must be negotiated and combined into a final budget before the end of the legislative session, which wraps up on March 10.

As the Omicron surge wanes, the Washington State Senate Facilities and Operations Committee announced this week it would allow some members of the public in the gallery to watch floor debates. Members of the public will now be allowed in the North Gallery of the Senate but must take a COVID-19 test beforehand. Masking and physical distancing will be required. A new metal detector has also been installed outside the North Gallery to prevent weapons from making their way in. The House Executive Rules Committee also authorized an increase in the number of lawmakers allowed on the House floor.

**Important Dates:**

February 28 – Opposite House Fiscal Cutoff

March 4 – Opposite House Floor Cutoff

March 10 – Sine Die