

Capitol News

March 12, 2023

Melissa Johnson, WSLHA Lobbyist

WSLHA Priorities

[HB 1001](#), the Audiologist/Speech-Language Pathologist licensure compact bill, was heard in the Senate Health & Long Term Care Committee on Thursday. WSLHA testified in support of this bill. It is scheduled for executive session on Tuesday.

[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, is scheduled for a hearing in the Senate Health & Long Term Care Committee on Tuesday.

[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.

HB 1508 passed the House last Monday. It is scheduled for a hearing on Friday in the Senate Health & Long Term Care Committee. It has been amended to prohibit the Health Care Cost Transparency Board from requiring any health care provider that is 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. Additional amendments are being worked on that would further define this exemption.

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

- [HB 1436](#) is OSPI-request legislation that would **lift the special education cap** by the 2027-28 school year. It has a hearing in the Senate Early Learning & K12 Committee on Wednesday.
- [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 has a hearing in the House Education Committee on Tuesday.
- [HB 1109](#) increases the **reimbursement for initial evaluations and IEPs** during the summers of 2023, 2023, and 2025. This bill will be heard in the Senate Early Learning & K12 Committee on Wednesday.

- [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. Last week, I erroneously reported that this bill had passed the House. In fact, **HB 1305 did not pass the House by last Wednesday's cutoff deadline.**

[HB 1565](#) addresses professional education workforce recruitment and retention, including the **Beginning Educator Support Team (BEST)** program. This bill is scheduled for a hearing on Monday in the Senate Early Learning & K12 Committee and executive session on Wednesday.

[HB 1479](#) related to **restraint and isolation of students** passed the House last Tuesday. It was amended as follows:

- Modifies the definition of "room clear" to specify that a room clear is not isolation, except as provided in OSPI rule
- Specifies that the professional development provided by OSPI must be provided to principals and other building administrators of the school districts and others that OSPI has prioritized for provision of professional development
- Requires the report on the use of room clears to identify best practices on the use of room clears, and changes the report due date to September 1, 2024, rather than September 1, 2026

General News

Last Wednesday marked the House of Origin 5pm cutoff deadline, when bills must have passed their house of origin (house bills out of the House; senate bills out of the Senate) or be dead for the session.

As the House of Origin cutoff approaches, there is always speculation as to what the last bill to be considered by each chamber will be. This bill is known as the "5:00 bill" referring to a rule that if debate begins on a bill prior to the 5:00pm cutoff, debate can continue *after* 5:00pm. Legislative leadership may choose the 5:00 bill because it is controversial with a lot of amendments, thus enabling them to work on the bill without taking up valuable floor time needed to pass other bills, or because the bill is of special importance to the majority caucus.

The Senate picked a broadly bipartisan, uncontroversial bill, SB 5600, for their 5:00 bill. SB 5600 extends the expiration date of the state Universal Communications Services Program by ten years. This program supports small companies that provide broadband services in rural areas, allowing for broadband in new locations in addition to maintaining current systems.

In contrast, the House majority leadership picked HB 1240, prohibiting the manufacture, importation, distribution, sale, or offer for sale of any assault-style weapon, with some exceptions. If the bill passes the Senate, Washington will join nine other states with similar bans.

The Legislature has focused on housing this session, to answer the estimated need to build an additional one million homes over the next two-plus decades to keep pace with population growth in Washington. As a result, several major bipartisan housing bills have recently passed their chambers of origin. On Monday, one such bill, HB 1110, passed the House. This bipartisan bill, known as the “middle housing” bill, legalizes duplexes or four-plexes in almost every neighborhood in larger Washington cities.

On Tuesday, the House passed HB 1541, the “Nothing About Us Without Us Act.” The goal of the bill is to include individuals who are directly impacted by government policies into the decision-making process by implementing membership requirements for statutory entities such as task forces, work groups, or advisory committees. The bill received bipartisan support from some Republicans who spoke to the importance of including Eastern Washington voices in advisory groups for issues such as siting clean energy operations.

On Thursday, the Legislature returned to committee hearings to address bills that have passed the opposite chamber. Policy committees have until March 29th to pass those bills, with the fiscal committee cutoff arriving quickly on April 4th. April 12th is the last day for consideration of bills from the opposite chamber, except those bills necessary to implement the budget, or NTIB.