

Final Capitol News

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The Legislature adjourned close to midnight Sunday night, finishing their business on time and with a few minutes to spare. Lawmakers pulled several all-nighters over the last few days of the session in order to meet that deadline.

Unfortunately, **SB 5887**, our **prior authorization bill**, died in the Senate. You'll recall that the House amended the bill to remove one of its key provisions, the provision allowing patients six visits without prior authorization for all new episodes of care during the plan year. The House amendment allowed a patient to have only one "episode of care" per year in which to have six visits without prior authorization. Current law allows six visits for a new condition, or episode of care, without limitation.

The Senate "refused to concur" with this amendment and sent it back to the House, asking that the House remove this amendment. The House refused to remove the amendment, and sent it back to the Senate. With the House unwilling to negotiate on this bill, it died in the Senate.

In the waning hours of the session, legislators passed a \$52.4 billion two-year operating budget and a corresponding revenue package of \$830 million. Highlights of the operating budget include:

- \$47 million to expand **community behavioral health** beds and services.
- \$92 million to ensure the stability of **state hospitals** and the safety of patients and staff.
- \$155 million for additional **special education** funding.
- \$61 million for additional **levy assistance** for areas with low property values.
- \$12 million for **paraeducator training**.
- \$2.5 million additional funding for **student mental health and safety**.
- \$35 million to expand **early learning** slots and rate increases.

The approved budget also funds the **School Employee Benefit Board (SEBB)** insurance program beginning January 1, 2020 (\$318.7 million).

The revenue package includes the passage of **HB 2158**, which raises \$376 million for higher education through a 20% surcharge on current **B&O taxes** on certain services. **These services consist of health care services, including those by SLPs and audiologists**, as well as engineering, legal, software publishing, and computing services. This increase is effective January 1, 2020.

Other elements of the revenue package include:

- SB 5998, raising \$243.5 million in changes to the **Real Estate Excise Tax (REET)**.
- HB 2167, raising \$133.2 million in increases in **B&O taxes** on large financial institutions.
- SB 6016, raising \$59.4 million by **narrowing tax preferences** for international investment firms.
- HB 1873, raising \$19 million for public health and cancer research by a **tax on vaping products**.

I want to thank the WSLHA Board members for their work this legislative session. Your expert analysis on legislation affecting the speech and hearing professions was invaluable!

