Capitol News

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Melissa Johnson, WSLHA Lobbyist

# Priority Bill Updates

Unfortunately, there will be no consideration of our priority bills this session. **HB 1043 (A-SLP Compact)** and **HB 1047 (mandating insurance coverage for children’s hearing aids**) did not receive hearings this session, but remain eligible for consideration next session. However, there is some good news on HB 1047. Since the question of how much this bill will cost the state is the primary legislative hurdle, WSLHA is working on a strategy to direct the Insurance Commissioner’s Office (OIC) to determine the cost of the hearing aid mandate. With this information, we will have a better chance to pass this bill in the 2022 session.

# Last Week’s Highlights

At **1,058 bills**, both the House and Senate have introduced half as much legislation in the virtual session as compared to prior sessions. Committees in both chambers were busy voting out this smaller selection of policy bills this week as the February 15 deadline for bills to leave policy committee approaches. This deadline, which does not apply to fiscal bills and those deemed “necessary to implement the budget,” is the first of the winnowing hurdles a bill must clear in the legislative process.

This week, with a strong 47-2 bipartisan vote, the Senate passed **HB 1368, the “early action” bill** providing economic relief in response to the pandemic. The funding is a combination of federal stimulus moneys received at the end of 2020 and state funding. It now goes to Governor Inslee, who is expected to sign it next week. Because the legislation has an emergency clause, it will take effect immediately upon signature.

Governor Inslee signed **SB 5061, the unemployment legislation**, into law on Monday. This bill cuts taxes for businesses who are seeing an increase in their premiums due in April. The bill contains an emergency clause so that it took effect upon the Governor’s signature.

**HB 1496**, the **“capital gains”** bill, was heard on Thursday, with 1662 people signing in pro and 479 con. Proponents of the bill argue Washington’s tax code is unjust, while opponents claim a capital gains tax is a volatile source of revenue and raise questions about whether or not it is an income tax. Half of the receipts from this tax would go to early learning, and half would go to the state’s general fund.

**HB 1196**, the bill that creates reimbursement parity for **audio-only consultations**, is now in the Rules Committee, one step from being voted on by the House. It was amended in committee to delay the implementation of this reimbursement until January 1, 2023. The bill was also amended to require the Office of the Insurance Commissioner (OIC) to do a study on audio-only consultations, in collaboration with the Health Care Authority and the Telehealth Collaborative.

**SB 5169,** the bill providing reimbursement to health care providers for the cost of **PPE** when treating patients in person, passed the Senate unanimously! It now goes to the House for consideration.

**SB 5302,** the bill establishing a **database of vendors** of state-approved PPE equipment, is now in the Senate Ways & Means Committee. It has not been scheduled for a hearing yet.

On Thursday, the **Senate Republicans released their proposed 2021-23 operating budget**. This budget contains no new revenue. Instead, it uses new federal dollars, funds from the Budget Stabilization Account, and redirects sales tax revenue to the transportation budget. The House Republicans are expected to release their budget next week. The House and Senate Democrats will release their budget next month.

# This Week’s Events

We are entering the sixth week of the legislative session, and the focus shifts to the fiscal committees. These committees will meet all week to hear and vote on bills to meet the February 22nd deadline. These committees include House Appropriations, House Finance, House Capital Budget, and Senate Ways & Means. But remember that this deadline does not apply to bills deemed “necessary to implement the budget.

In addition to the fiscal committee hearings, the House Health Care & Wellness Committee will hear an update on the COVID vaccination distribution on Monday.