



# Better Jobs, Stronger Communities

## 2023 Legislative Agenda of the Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO

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After three years, the COVID-19 pandemic has altered the economy and exposed how tenuous economic security is for working families. Exposure to dangerous viral infections has led to burnout for frontline essential workers, particularly in health care and consumer services. Inflation driven by pandemic supply-chain disruptions, Russia's war on Ukraine, and record corporate profits has made it difficult, if not impossible, for working parents to make ends meet and secure quality, reliable child care. Meanwhile, income inequality and the impacts of climate change continue to ravage the middle class, and economic opportunity promised by the energy transition has yet to be realized.

**In 2023, the State Legislature must take steps to grow an economy that works for working people by prioritizing job creation and work-life balance, safety on the job, and dignity in our employment.**

### INVEST IN ESSENTIAL PUBLIC WORKERS

The first thing the State Legislature can do to support working people is to honor collective bargaining and statutory pay requirements by funding the contracts and healthcare agreements for state employees, teachers, and other educational staff who kept our state going throughout the pandemic. Legislators can also expand collective bargaining rights to more workers, and increase pay for part-time CTC faculty, para-educators and other low-wage education professionals.



- ❑ **Expand Collective Bargaining Rights** — Frontline state supervisors in WMS band 1, and academic student employees at regional four-year universities should have the right to come together to form unions and negotiate for better wages and working conditions.
- ❑ **Minimum Standards for Bargaining Unit Information** — To ensure that unions can deliver on their duty to represent all employees—in good faith and without discrimination—public employers shall provide employee contact information to an exclusive bargaining representative within certain time limits.
- ❑ **Protect Private Member Records** — Protect union membership records from employers' fishing expeditions in lawsuits to which the union is not a party.
- ❑ **OFM Salary Survey** — In advance of contract negotiations, the Office of Financial Management conducts a salary survey to better understand compensation across like jobs in different states and communities. During bargaining, however, this survey's use is limited. The Legislature should make it clear that this research is allowed to be used to inform conversations about compensation.

### CREATE CLIMATE TRANSITION JOBS

As energy policy changes in light of the climate crisis, the Legislature should support the notion that the jobs in the clean energy sector be well-paying, high-quality union jobs for those who construct, maintain, and operate modern energy facilities, schools, and factories. These priorities will help deliver on that promise by addressing two existential problems at once—runaway income inequality and climate disruption.



- ❑ **Climate Upgrades to Schools** — The opportunity to reduce energy consumption by modernizing our schools is enormous. Energy conservation and generation advancements, HVAC and heating upgrades, water improvements, and other investments will lower related carbon emissions, improve student and staff health, and create thousands of quality construction jobs.
- ❑ **Siting and Permitting** — The Legislature should build on improvements to energy facility siting and permitting processes made in 2022. As our state's energy strategy evolves, these processes must also adapt to ensure timely, predictable reviews without denying impacted communities substantive opportunities for input.
- ❑ **Buy Clean/Buy Fair** — The state spends billions of dollars a year on construction materials for public infrastructure, which are often manufactured overseas in countries with poor labor standards and woefully inadequate environmental protections. The state should pilot a program to track the labor and environmental impact of the materials it purchases to build our roads, bridges, and public buildings.

## MORE HOUSING OPTIONS FOR WORKING FAMILIES

Workers at nearly all income levels are struggling to secure adequate, affordable housing near the jobs and communities that support their families' well-being. The state must take significant steps to increase housing options for the unhoused, low-income earners, retirees, and middle-class working families whose paychecks haven't kept up with the costs of rent and mortgages.



- ❑ **Reform Exclusionary Zoning** — Zoning that blocks construction of more affordable, denser, housing options should be reformed so more housing options are available for wage-earning workers and their families.
- ❑ **Legalize Significant Density Near Transit** — To maximize the benefits of our transportation investments—and give people more options for their trips to work, school, and the grocery store—the Legislature should take significant steps to promote transit-oriented development.
- ❑ **Make It Easier to Build** — By streamlining permitting, and removing parking mandates, lawmakers can remove barriers to housing construction and lower homes' costs.

## WORKER PROTECTIONS

Too many workers in Washington state go to work each day without confidence they will return home free from harm. When the worst does happen, elements of our workers' compensation system—especially when managed by self-insured employers—fail to deliver on the promise of sure and certain relief. Common sense improvements to health and safety laws can avoid injuries, and modest improvements to workers' compensation regulation will better allow injured workers to heal and return to work.



- ❑ **Safety at Work** — L&I is prohibited by law from adopting common sense rules to avoid musculoskeletal injuries due to a business-run initiative 20 years ago. The Legislature should allow L&I to adopt these regulations to avoid the biggest driver in workers' compensation claims and costs—injuries due to musculoskeletal injuries and diseases.
- ❑ **Employee Free Speech** — Workers across the country are finding their power by coming together to join unions, and employers are working harder than ever to stop them. The use of forced captive-audience meetings is a tactic that bosses use to intimidate workers into abandoning their voice. The Legislature should protect workers by banning forced speech meetings like those used by Starbucks and Amazon to threaten workers for organizing.

- ❑ **Reform Compelled Medical Exams** — In many workers' compensation claims, workers are often subjected to compelled examinations by third-party doctors who fail to adequately review medical files or meaningfully assess the injured workers. Workers should be allowed to record these exams, as in non-workers' compensation litigation.
- ❑ **Hold TPAs Accountable in Workers' Comp** — Employers who self-insure workers' compensation often utilize third-party administrators to aggressively manage claims, reduce injured workers' benefits, and drag out litigation that results in settlements for pennies on the dollar. The Legislature should adopt strict standards for behavior, and increase penalties for when TPAs' actions result in unlawful delays in benefits and abuse of injured workers.
- ❑ **PTSD Occupational Disease for Health Care** — Healthcare workers are consistently exposed to the physical, psychological, and emotional trauma of their patients. This creates a toll on these workers' own wellbeing. In recent years, the Legislature has expanded workers' compensation protection to other workers with PTSD due to regular—instead of just singular—traumas, Lawmakers should do the same for our healthcare workforce.
- ❑ **Warehouse Worker Protections** — Workers in largely automated warehouses, particularly those owned by Amazon, have experienced a significant increase in workplace injuries due to lax health-and-safety protections and demanding quotas that pit workers against automated fulfillment systems. The Legislature should put sideboards on this model to avoid worker exploitation, and to protect their health.
- ❑ **Covid Occupational Disease Fix** — The 2021 Legislature passed HELSA, a landmark pandemic-era slate of worker protections. Unfortunately, many of the workers who should benefit from the workers' compensation elements of the law have been denied benefits due to ambiguity in the language for presumptive disease coverage. The Legislature should fix this gap in occupational disease coverage for these essential workers.
- ❑ **Personnel Files** — Workers have a right to know what information their employers hold in personnel files. The Legislature should adopt a law to enforce that right.
- ❑ **Highway Worker Safety** — Our state highways are some of the most dangerous job sites in the state, especially for those tasked with building, maintaining, and improving this critical infrastructure. Lawmakers should adopt higher standards for safety to ensure these workers return home unharmed every day.
- ❑ **Wage Replacement for Workers Left Out** — Not every worker qualifies for unemployment insurance. The State should take steps to provide a supplemental wage replacement benefit for those uncovered by UI.
- ❑ **Unemployment for Caregivers** — Current UI law makes it difficult for workers with caregiving responsibilities at home to find suitable work at times or locations that work for their families. The Legislature should adjust the "good cause quit" standards to accommodate modern family care giving needs.

## HEALTHCARE STAFFING STANDARDS

Workers in the healthcare sector are suffering. Three years of pandemic crisis management was preceded by years of short staffing, leaving frontline healthcare workers burned out. The Legislature must intervene to ensure that this critical workforce is able not just to meet our needs for care, but to thrive as individuals with their own lives and families.



- ❑ **Nursing Staff Minimums** — The Legislature must continue its work in establishing reasonable nursing staff minimums to make sure that we all receive the level of care we deserve because our care providers have reasonable workloads.
- ❑ **Close Loopholes, Enforce Overtime & Rest Breaks** — Recent improvements to overtime and breaks standards for healthcare workers should be adequately enforced and have loopholes closed in order to deliver on the promise made by the Legislature in 2019.
- ❑ **Functional & Responsive Staffing Committees** — The current structure for staffing committees at hospitals has not led to improvements on the ground. It is time to make these more functional and ensure that these committees' work guides the staffing structure that delivers our care when we need it the most,

## WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Washington has a need for deep investment in workforce development. We must widen the pipeline for skilled, professional nurses and other healthcare workers, secure and grow our manufacturing workforce to leverage domestic supply chain development opportunities, and to build the climate and transportation infrastructure necessary to deliver on our state's energy transition.

### Manufacturing

- ❑ Study manufacturing opportunities to identify the best sectors to accelerate production of materials necessary for our state's energy transition. This analysis should include the needs of current manufacturing employers, including supply chain challenges, and opportunities to attract new investments. This will help Washington state hone its competitive edge in industrial employment.
- ❑ Aviation is a critical component of our manufacturing sector. The state should continue its \$2 million annual aviation workforce and apprenticeship investments.

### Grocery

- ❑ Meat Cutting and Fishmonger apprenticeships provide workers in the grocery sector an opportunity to improve their skills and earnings, securing quality careers in a trade that is in high demand by food industry employers. The state should invest \$1 million to match private dollars in union grocery apprenticeship programs.

### Health Care

- ❑ Nurse educators' compensation at 4-year universities must be improved, building on progress made at CTCs.
- ❑ Building the healthcare workforce from within with matching funds for joint labor-management programs appropriated by the Legislature. This will expand the pipeline for desperately needed frontline care providers.

### Construction

- ❑ Study future clean energy necessities to identify the needed occupations and skill sets that our green energy transition requires. A committee of training providers should be included to inform the study's findings.
- ❑ Expand apprenticeship utilization standards to sub-contractors on state projects and to local governments.
- ❑ Include training agent status as part of responsible bidder criteria to expand apprenticeship opportunities.
- ❑ K-12 pre-apprenticeship investments that expand Core Plus offerings in to new crafts.
- ❑ Drivers' Licenses — Having a valid drivers' license is functionally necessary for workers in several industries, including construction, to be able to work. Current suspension practices compound joblessness and economic mobility barriers. The Legislature should revise ineligibility criteria, restrictions, fees and fines, penalties, and other sanctions for WSDL reinstatement to ensure that one mistake doesn't doom working families to poverty.

### Job Skills Program

- ❑ Increase funding for the Job Skills Program so that more employers can seek matching funds to modernize incumbent worker training in sectors requiring new skills or technology to remain competitive.

### Maritime

- ❑ Expand maritime training programs to more community and technical colleges outside of Seattle.

## EDUCATION

Educational investments are a core duty of state government, the prioritization of which pays dividends in terms of students' social and emotional health, and economic wellbeing. Supporting teachers, faculty, and employee wages, reasonable levels of staff, and making investments in nutrition and early learning will be a significant priority in 2023.

- ❑ **Fund Statutory K-12 and CTC Inflationary Wage Increases and General Living Wage Salary Increases for Faculty and Staff** — This investment will improve our institutions' ability to retain and recruit educators to best serve students' needs.
- ❑ **Increase PT Faculty Pay** — Part-time faculty make much less per class than their full-time colleagues. The 2023 budget should make progress toward closing this wage gap.
- ❑ **Public School Nutrition** — Provide free access to school meals to ensure students have a solid foundation for learning and health.

## □ **Early Learning & Child Care**

- Bonus for Non-Standard Hours (DCYF) — Adopt rate enhancement for providing non-standard hours of care at Early Achievers facilities. By broadening the available hours of child care, the Legislature will make it more accessible for working parents in critical 24-hour jobs where the work day starts early, ends late, and for shifts that run overnight.
- Flexible Work & Income Requirements for Apprentices — As workers transition in to apprenticeship programs, many find themselves disqualified from necessary public support. The Legislature should make Working Connections available for those enrolled in state-registered apprenticeships, and should raise the SMI threshold for meaningful apprenticeship access to childcare assistance. Further, DSHS should seek a federal waiver to income eligibility criteria for first-year apprentices.
- Near Site Childcare Pilots Job Skills Program Fund a pilot to explore construction job-site proximate childcare facilities with subsidies to support childcare access.

- **Teacher Residency** — Support teacher residencies which are diversifying the workforce, addressing subject-matter staffing shortages and are an impactful retention strategy.

## HEALTH & WELLBEING

Washington state has a social safety net that provides meaningful support for families when they need it most. However, there are gaps through which workers fall that the Legislature should prioritize filling so no one is left behind.

- **Paid Family & Medical Leave** — The Legislature should pass into law the recommendations made by the PFML Legislative Task Force to ensure the financial health of this extremely popular and effective program.
- **Sick Leave for Construction Workers** — Washington's landmark sick leave law approved by voters in 2016 has helped workers take better care of themselves and their families. However, many construction workers have been unable to utilize this benefit due to the revolving nature of their employment. The Legislature should provide flexibility to ensure these workers can better utilize this benefit.
- **Rail Worker Sick Leave** — Despite years of attempting to secure basic rights to sick leave, railroad workers across the state remain one of the few groups of workers without this core protection. Whether they are sick with COVID, the flu, or more serious medical conditions, these workers are still subject to discipline and termination for calling in sick. After the imposition of a contract by Congress, no substantive improvement is on the horizon. Lawmakers in 2023 should take action to end this absurd disparity.
- **Health Care for Bus Drivers** — School districts contract transportation services to contractors that fail to provide adequate health and pension benefits. The Legislature should ensure contracted bus drivers, who provide the same exact services as school district employed bus drivers, have comparable benefits.

- **Hospital Mergers** — Large healthcare systems continue to absorb competitors, which in many cases has reduced patients' access to important care, including contraception and abortion. The state must pass laws to ensure that these mergers do not restrict access to necessary health care and family planning resources, especially in rural communities where options are limited.
- **Fire Proofing Materials** — When there's a fire in commercial building, dozens—if not hundreds or thousands—of lives can be at risk. Time makes all the difference in saving those inside. The proper application of fire proofing materials buys the time necessary for occupants to exit and for first responders to do their duty. The Legislature should adopt training and certification requirements to ensure that this critical element of fire safety is always performed correctly.

## RETIREMENT

Washington's labor community will support the full funding of our public pensions, and improvements for workers who have earned it, especially for those whose benefits are low or out of synch with their needs. This includes cost-of-living adjustments for plans that do not already have them worked into their structures, like PERS and TRS Plan 1.

## REVENUE

Washington state has the most regressive, upside-down, and backward tax system in the country. Low-and-middle income families pay far more of their income than so the wealthiest to support our schools, safety net programs, and public safety. The labor community supports revenue options that secure high-quality public services and jobs, but that do not fall on working families. Further, when tax preferences are considered, they should be tied to strict labor standards which promote the highest quality and number of jobs practicable.

**In addition to this 2023 Legislative Agenda**, the WSLC will support other legislation championed by its affiliated unions and a range of issues to address economic opportunity and justice.

**The Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO** is the state's largest labor organization, representing some 600 local unions with 550,000 rank-and-file members. Please contact the WSLC's officers and staff if you have questions about the council's positions on workers' issues:

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