

# 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; increase pay for part-time community and technical college faculty, paraeducators and other low-wage education professionals; protect private union membership records; and take other steps to make public employee bargaining more efficient and fair.



### CREATE CLIMATE JOBS

As energy policies evolve amid the climate crisis, the Legislature should support the concept that the jobs in the clean energy sector should be good-paying, high-quality union jobs. The skilled workers who construct, maintain, and operate modern energy facilities, schools, and factories must earn livable wages and benefits. This will help address two existential problems at once — runaway income inequality and climate disruption. Specifically, the Legislature can invest in climate upgrades at our public schools, further improve siting and permitting processes for energy facilities, and track the environmental and labor impacts of our state's infrastructure materials.



### HEALTHCARE STAFFING STANDARDS

Our healthcare workers are suffering. Three years of pandemic crisis management was preceded by years of short staffing, leaving frontline healthcare workers burned out. Lawmakers must intervene to ensure this critical workforce not only meets our needs for care, but also can thrive as individuals with their own lives and families. That means setting nursing staff minimums, closing loopholes in overtime and rest-break rules, and ensuring functional hospital staffing committees.



### HOUSING OPTIONS FOR WORKING FAMILIES

Working families are struggling to get affordable housing near their jobs and communities. The Legislature can increase housing options for the unhoused, retirees, and low- and middle-income families by reforming exclusionary zoning, legalizing significant density near transit, and making it easier to build affordable housing.

### WORKER PROTECTIONS

Too many workers go to work every day without confidence that 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. The Legislature should make common-sense changes to health and safety laws, like restoring the state's ability to protect workers from musculoskeletal injuries and protecting warehouse workers from dangerous production quotas, and modest workers' comp reforms so injured workers can heal and return to work.



## WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Washington must make significant investments in workforce development. We can widen the pipeline for skilled, professional nurses and healthcare workers, secure and grow our manufacturing workforce to leverage domestic supply chain development opportunities, and 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.
- ❑ Make K-12 pre-apprenticeship investments that expand Core Plus offerings in to new crafts.

### Maritime

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

## OTHER PRIORITIES

The WSLC and its affiliated unions will work to advance several other issues in 2023, either through legislation or

the budget. These include, but are not limited to:

- ❑ **Improve access to early learning and child care** by establishing a bonus for non-standard hours of care at Early Achievers facilities, ensuring flexible work and income requirements for apprentices seeking childcare assistance, and creating a pilot program for childcare facilities near construction job sites.
- ❑ **Protect employee free speech** by banning captive-audience meetings that bosses use to bust unions and intimidate workers exercising their freedom to organize.
- ❑ **Support teacher residencies** to improve workforce diversity and address subject-matter staffing shortages.
- ❑ **Strengthen Paid Family & Medical Leave** by adopting recommendations of Legislative Task Force.
- ❑ **Promote paid sick leave** for construction workers unable to utilize benefits from the landmark 2016 law.
- ❑ **Fully fund public pensions** and make improvements for those with low benefits or who lack COLA adjustments.
- ❑ **Grant unemployment insurance** to workers currently not covered because of their immigration status.
- ❑ **Ensure hospital mergers** don't limit healthcare access.

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

Union members comprise 18% of Washington's workforce, making it the third most unionized state in the nation. Widely considered to be the "voice of labor" in Washington, 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. One of the services the WSLC provides its affiliated unions is legislative education and advocacy. As with collective bargaining, WSLC unions join forces and speak with a united voice on public policy issues affecting working families.

Please contact the WSLC's officers and staff if you have questions about the council's positions on workers' issues:

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