

Invest in Essential Public Workers



The first thing the Washington State Legislature can do to support working people in the 2023 session is to honor collective bargaining and statutory pay requirements by funding the contracts and healthcare agreements for state employees, teachers, and other educational staff. These essential workers 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.

- **Washington's population has continued to grow, but the state workforce has not kept up.** In 2002, there were just over 6 million residents with 63,975 general government employees serving them. In 2022, population has ballooned to 7.4 million residents but state employee headcount has stagnated at just 67,721 workers. Fewer public workers are available to provide Washingtonians with the services they depend on.
- **Lower staffing results in mandatory overtimes and burnout** for dedicated public workers and fewer services for the most vulnerable Washingtonians.
- **Compensation has lagged behind**, exacerbating low staffing levels and creating hazardous work environments. The state's 2022 salary survey found that, on average, the state's overall compensation lags the market by over 16%. The disparity is greater in many job classifications.
- **State employee contracts take a good first step in addressing this crises.** For example, to begin addressing public vs. private wage disparities, the Washington Federation of State Employees' 2023-25 general government contract includes a \$1,000 retention bonus, a 7% cost-of-living adjustment and job-class specific raises for 185 positions with documentable recruitment and retention problems.
- **The contracts also include common-sense solutions to other retention issues.** For example, the WFSE contract also includes a COVID booster incentive payment that will result in the highest number of state employees choosing to receive their boosters, the lowest number of employees choosing to leave state service, and minimal impact to Washingtonians' ability to access critical public services.



Based on OFM state employee headcount and OFM population estimates. Headcount does not include higher education.

- **State employee COLAs have not kept up with the rising cost of living.** Because cost-of-living adjustments have failed to keep pace with inflation, over the last 15 years, state employees have lost 16.3% in purchasing power. Even if inflation is flat between 2023 and 2025, state employees will still be behind by 9.3%.
- **Public service isn't just about a paycheck, it's a calling.** But many dedicated state employees simply can't afford to work in the public sector in Washington state. Let's make sure our state's workforce can afford to live in the communities they keep running. Funding the 2023-25 state employee contracts is a good starting point for workers who are simply trying to catch up.



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

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INVEST IN ESSENTIAL PUBLIC WORKERS

(continued from front)



In addition to funding state employee contracts and healthcare agreements, the Legislature should:

- ❑ **Fully fund Washington's Community and Technical Colleges (CTCs).** We must invest in both our education staff and our students, improving working conditions at CTCs so we can improve learning conditions.

The state wants 70% of post-high school Washingtonians to have an apprenticeship, degree or credential. But the state has yet to make the investment in our higher education system and our CTCs — in particular, *the people who make them work* — to reach that goal. As it stands CTC instructors earn lower pay than K-12 teachers and part-time faculty face high inequity and job insecurity.



The revenue forecast continues to be positive for the next biennium. We call on legislators to finally fund the entire CTC system. Faculty and staff are crucial to student attainment of both essential and technical skills. By investing in their salaries and in wraparound services for students and cost-free college, the state will support one of its most powerful economic engines and position its workforce for the good jobs that build strong communities.

AFT Washington, which represent about 6,500 members including CTC faculty and pre-K through 12 classified employees is calling on the Legislature to support:

- Pay equity for part-time faculty (SB 5557) — In many colleges, part-time faculty are paid as little as 52% of what full-time staff earn for teaching the same class with the same qualifications;
- Full funding for a cost-of-living adjustment and meaningful investments in faculty and professional staff salary adjustments of \$157 million to help with recruitment and

retention by bringing our CTC salaries more in line with K12 salaries in our state;

- Increased funding for nutrition services workers (HB 1238 /SB 5339) needed to provide free meals for preK-12;
- New tenure-track positions at regional colleges;
- Paraeducator workforce development (HB 1015/SB 6254) to establish important employment standards;
- Increasing the School Employees Benefits package; and
- Increase the Washington College Grant (HB 1156), work the Communities for Our Colleges Coalition is leading, to and provide critical wrap-around services for students.

- ❑ **Protect Union Members' Private Records** (HB 1187) — Union stewards are a key way to resolve workplace disputes ranging from protocols to harassment, or even stalking and discrimination. Whatever the topic, trust and confidentiality are key. But these communications have no privacy protections in Washington and union records can, in some cases, be subpoenaed by employers or other entities. This has a chilling effect on workers and negatively impacts unions' ability to dutifully represent its members.

HB 1187 is a common-sense fix to this problem. It would add "union representative" to entities like attorneys, peer-to-peer counselors, and domestic violence advocates who do not have to disclose the contents of private conversations. Other states, like Maryland and Illinois, have already established a legal right to privacy for union communications. Washington should do the same by ensuring a right to privacy in communications between workers and their unions.

- ❑ **Minimum Standards for Bargaining Unit Information** (HB 1200/SB 5273) — To ensure that unions can deliver on their duty to represent all employees—in good faith and without discrimination—public employers should provide employee contact information to an exclusive bargaining representative within certain time limits.
- ❑ **Expand Collective Bargaining Rights** — Frontline state supervisors in Washington Management Services (SB 5141/HB 1122) and academic student employees at regional four-year universities (SB 5238/HB 1291) should have the right to come together to form unions and negotiate for better wages and working conditions.



Union members comprise 18% of Washington's workforce, making it the third most unionized state in the nation. Widely considered the "voice of labor" in our state, the **Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO** is the state's largest labor organization, representing some 600 unions with 550,000 members. 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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