



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 Legislature can do to support working people is 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 during the pandemic. Legislators can also expand collective bargaining rights and increase pay for part-time CTC faculty, para-educators and other low-wage education professionals.



- ❑ **Expand Collective Bargaining Rights** — Frontline state supervisors in Washington Management Service (HB 1122/SB 5141), and academic student employees (HB 1291/SB 5238) at regional four-year universities should have the right to join together in unions and negotiate for better wages and working conditions.
- ❑ **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 shall provide employee contact information to an exclusive bargaining representative within certain time limits.
- ❑ **Protect Private Member Records** (HB 1187) — Protect union membership records from employers' fishing expeditions in lawsuits to which the union is not a party.
- ❑ **OFM Salary Survey** (TBA) — In advance of contract negotiations, the Office of Financial Management conducts a salary survey to better understand compensation across like jobs in other states and communities. During bargaining, however, this survey's use is limited. The Legislature should clarify that this research can be used to inform conversations about compensation.

CREATE CLIMATE 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.



- ❑ **Siting and Permitting** (HB 1216/SB 5380) — Legislators 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** (HB 1282/SB 5322) — The state spends billions every year on construction materials for public infrastructure, which are often manufactured overseas in countries with poor labor standards and 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.
- ❑ **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.

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** (HB 1110/SB 5190) — Zoning that blocks construction of more affordable, denser housing should be reformed so more housing options are available for wage-earning workers and their families.
- ❑ **Legalize Significant Density Near Transit** (HB 1517/SB 5466) — To maximize the benefits of our transportation investments—and give people more options for trips to work, school, and the grocery store—legislators should take significant steps to promote transit-oriented development.
- ❑ **Flexibility on Parking Minimums** (HB 1351/SB 5456) — To create more housing options, the state should prohibit minimum parking requirements except in limited cases, particularly within proximity to public transit services.
- ❑ **Make It Easier to Build** (HB 1167) — By streamlining permitting processes, 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.



- ❑ **Washington Safe at Work** (SB 5217) — The state is prohibited from adopting common sense rules to avoid work-related musculoskeletal disorders due to a business-run initiative 20 years ago. The Legislature should allow L&I to adopt such regulations to avoid these biggest drivers in workers' compensation claims and costs.
- ❑ **Employee Free Speech** (SB 5417) — Workers across the country are finding their power by joining together in unions, and employers are working harder than ever to stop them. Companies, including Starbucks and Amazon, often use coercive captive-audience meetings to intimidate workers into abandoning their voice. The Legislature should ban employers from firing or retaliating against workers who choose not to participate in such meetings.
- ❑ **Reform Compelled Medical Exams** (HB 1068/SB 5212) — In 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' comp litigation.
- ❑ **Hold TPAs Accountable in Workers' Comp** (HB 1521/SB 5524)— Employers that 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 stricter standards and increase penalties when TPAs' actions result in unlawful delays in benefits and abuse of injured workers.
- ❑ **PTSD Occupational Disease for Health Care** (HB 1593/SB 5454) — Healthcare workers are consistently exposed to the physical, psychological, and emotional trauma of their patients, creating 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 healthcare workers.
- ❑ **Warehouse Worker Protections** (SB 5348) — Workers in largely automated warehouses, particularly those owned by Amazon, experience significantly higher injury rates 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** (TBA) — 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** (HB 1320/SB 5061) — Workers have a right to know what information employers put in their personnel files. The Legislature should enforce that right.
- ❑ **Highway Worker Safety** (SB 5272) — Our state highways are some of the most dangerous job sites in the state, especially for those who build, maintain, and improve this critical infrastructure. Lawmakers should adopt higher safety standards to ensure these workers return home unharmed every day.
- ❑ **Wage Replacement for Workers Left Out** (HB 1095/SB 5109) — Not every worker qualifies for unemployment insurance. The state should take steps to provide a supplemental wage replacement benefit for these workers.
- ❑ **Unemployment for Caregivers** (HB 1106) — Current unemployment insurance 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, by passing SB 5236.



- ❑ **Nursing Staff Minimums** — SB 5236 would continue the Legislature’s work 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** — SB 5236 would also ensure recent improvements to overtime and breaks standards for healthcare workers are adequately enforced and close loopholes in order to deliver on the promise made by the Legislature in 2019.
- ❑ **Functional & Responsive Staffing Committees** — The current structure for hospital staffing committees has not led to improvements on the ground. SB 5236 would also make these committees more functional and ensure that their 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

- ❑ (SB 5269) 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 our 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

- ❑ (HB 1176/SB 5247) 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.
- ❑ (HB 1050) Extend apprenticeship utilization standards to subcontractors on state projects and to local governments.
- ❑ (SB 5133) 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** (SB 5557) — Part-time faculty make much less per class than their full-time colleagues. The 2023 budget should start closing this wage gap.
- ❑ **Public School Nutrition** (HB 1238/SB 5339) — 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.
- (HB 1309/SB 5088) 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** (TBA) — Support teacher residencies that are diversifying the workforce, addressing subject-matter staffing shortages and improving retention.

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** (SB 5286) — 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** (SB 5111) — Our state'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 are 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** (HB 1548/SB 5267) — Despite years of attempting to secure basic rights to sick leave, railroad workers 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 still face 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** (HB 1263/SB 5241) — 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** (HB 1323/SB 5253) — 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 supports the full funding of our public pensions and improvements for those whose benefits are low or out of synch with their needs (HB 1055/SB 5328). This includes cost-of-living adjustments for plans that do not already have them worked into their structures, like PERS and TRS Plan 1 (HB 1057/SB 5350).

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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