



Reclaiming Worker Power Energizing Our Movement



2024 Legislative Agenda of the Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO

The pandemic altered Washington’s economy and exposed how tenuous economic security is for working families. Now workers are joining together to demand better wages and working conditions. But unnecessary obstacles exist for organizing unions, accessing safety nets for injured and unemployed workers, attaining safe and healthy working conditions, and getting benefits that strengthen our families. **In 2024, the State Legislature should remove some of these unnecessary obstacles that working families face as they seek better jobs and stronger communities.**

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE FOR STRIKERS



Rather than negotiate a fair contract, some employers weaponize the economic instability of workers – especially low-income workers – to force a strike and “starve them out.” Washington should join New York, New Jersey and Maine in allowing workers to access unemployment insurance after more than two weeks on strike. This will help level the playing field, discourage economic hardship as a bargaining strategy, and promote good-faith contract negotiations.



WORKERS’ COMPENSATION FAIRNESS

Workers’ compensation administrators for all employers should be held to standards of “good faith and fair dealing.” But in Washington, only injured workers in the public sector currently have that protection. The Legislature should end this two-tiered system. All workers, public and private, should be entitled to basic fairness if they are injured at work.



EMPLOYEE FREE CHOICE

Multiple states protect workers from forced meetings about political or religious speech that is irrelevant to their work. Washington should join them.

SANITARY PROTECTIONS

Construction workers who menstruate and/or express milk lack the necessary accommodations to protect their safety and health on job sites. Washington should require that those barriers to employment be removed to protect these workers and promote equity in the industry.



PERC CARDS

The Washington State Public Employment Relations Commission (PERC) does not allow digital signatures for union authorization cards.

The Legislature should modernize this process and ensure public employees can use digital signatures when they seek to join together and seek union recognition.



FERTILITY COVERAGE

Access to fertility services should not be reserved only for the wealthy. Working people should be able to grow their families as well. Requiring regulated insurance plans in Washington to include fertility coverage would make this treatment more affordable for parents.



CLIMATE JOBS & JUSTICE

- ❑ **Siting and Permitting** – Legislators should build on improvements to energy facility siting and permitting processes made in 2022 and 2023. Local siting and permitting processes should be aligned with the state-level process.
- ❑ **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.
- ❑ **Electrical transmission worker task force** – A study should be conducted to evaluate future needs of the electrical transmission workforce if Washington State is going to meet the needs to increase electrical transmission capacity and achieve our climate goals.
- ❑ **School bus electrification** (HB 1368) – Protect kids by transitioning Washington’s school buses from asthma-causing diesel to modern, safe, comfortable electric buses.

FAMILY POLICY

Child care

- ❑ All children should get to play and learn with peers, while parents can go to work and provide for their families. When child care is not affordable or accessible, parents can’t go to school, enroll in apprenticeships, or work at quality jobs. The Legislature should make robust public investments in child care. The goal: a family should pay no more than 7% of their income for child care, and educators should earn living wages with benefits.

PFML Medical Authorization Fixes

- ❑ When workers need Paid Family and Medical Leave to take extended time off to care for themselves or a loved one, long delays in claims approval can occur when healthcare providers do not provide medical certification documentation in a timely manner. By adopting standards for making this documentation available, the Legislature would reduce the potential for additional delays in claims processing for workers who rely on these benefits to make ends meet while they are providing care or recovering themselves.

Wage Replacement for Workers Left Out

- ❑ Not every worker qualifies for unemployment insurance. HB 1095 / SB 5109 would take steps to provide a supplemental wage replacement benefit for workers not currently covered due to their immigration status.

Expanding Family Definition for Paid Sick Leave

- ❑ The Legislature should update the definition of “family member” in our paid sick leave law to accommodate all family compositions, including those who are not bound by blood or marriage. This would align standards for Sick and Safe leave with a recent modernization the Legislature adopted for Paid Family and Medical Leave.

PAY EQUITY

- ❑ **Prohibiting Discrimination Against Protected Classes** (HB 1905) – Washington’s current equal pay statute includes gender. The Legislature should ensure that race and other protected classes are included as well. Workers deserve to be paid fairly for their work, without discrimination on any basis.
- ❑ **Pay Equity for Part-time and Adjunct CTC Faculty Workforce** – Adjunct faculty wages at Community and Technical Colleges are far below the wage rates for full-time faculty, creating economic insecurity for these workers and a financial incentive for colleges to over-rely on this underpaid, precarious workforce. This pay inequity is a disservice to students since these faculty often work multiple jobs to make ends meet and are not paid for office hours that contribute to student success. The Legislature must approve funding and policies to close this pay gap and ensure equitable and professional compensation for adjunct faculty.
- ❑ **OFM Salary Survey Utilization** – In advance of contract negotiations, the Office of Financial Management conducts a salary survey to better understand compensation across like jobs in other states. During bargaining, however, this survey’s use is limited. The Legislature should clarify that this research can be used to inform conversations about compensation.

WORKER PROTECTIONS

- ❑ **Unemployment Insurance for Striking Workers** (see front)
- ❑ **Employee Free Choice Act** (see front).
- ❑ **Personnel Files** – Workers have a right to access critical information relating to their employment – including wage and benefits documentation. The Legislature should enforce that right.
- ❑ **Joint Legislative Task Force on the Underground Economy in the Construction Industry**
- ❑ **Grocery worker retention** – A policy to help safeguard the job security and livelihoods of grocery workers when their current employer sells to a new business. This bill protects the safety of food and medicine sold to Washington state families by preventing sudden and mass layoffs of the skilled and licensed employees who are trained and experienced in food and medicine safety when, for example, publicly traded corporations seek to increase profits through proposed mergers. It will protect workers by ensuring that the new owner will retain the existing workforce for a set period of time.
- ❑ **Mass layoff protections** (HB 2100) – For layoffs large enough to require WARN notices, the Legislature should require employers to conduct a survey on demographics of impacted workers and allow a rapid response presentation so workers get information on available benefits like unemployment insurance and healthcare coverage.

REVENUE

- ❑ **Tax Fairness** — Washington 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 include strict labor standards which promote the creation of high-quality jobs.
- ❑ **Local Government Tax Increment Financing**

HEALTH & SAFETY

- ❑ **Sanitary Protections for Menstruation and Lactation in Construction** (see front)
- ❑ **Workers' Compensation Fairness** (see front)
- ❑ **Early Time-Loss** (HB 1927): Under current law, an injured worker is denied the first three days of wage replacement benefits until they are off work for at least 14 days. When workers' are injured on the job, they should be paid for every single day they are unable to work. As a first step toward righting this injustice, the Legislature should reduce the waiting period to seven days only. This will ease the economic burden of being injured, and cause less financial harm to injured workers and their families.
- ❑ **Healthcare Benefits Continuity**
- ❑ **OPPOSE Return to Work/Third Party Light Duty**
- ❑ **Autonomous Vehicles** – Require Human Safety Operator
- ❑ **Protecting School Bus Drivers on the Job** — Makes trespassing on a bus a crime. A bus driver in the Tri-Cities was tragically killed while on the job. This bill tries to ensure only those who belong on school buses get entry.
- ❑ **Crane Safety** (HB 2022/SB 5900) — In response to the tragic incident in Seattle in 2019 when a tower crane fell, killing two Ironworkers and two members of the public, the Legislature should address safety by establishing permits for tower crane operation including assembly and disassembly, establish a work zone for traffic closures and public notification when tower cranes will be assembled and disassembled and establish criminal penalties on industries that violate certain safety laws.

HEALTH CARE & PUBLIC HEALTH

- ❑ **Fertility Services Coverage** (see front)
- ❑ **Keep Our Care Act** (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.
- ❑ **Health Care Cost Transparency Board**

- ❑ **Provider Contracting**
- ❑ **School Bus Driver Health Benefits** (HB 1248) — 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.
- ❑ **Essential Workers' Healthcare Trust** — Many nursing home workers don't have access to health care. The coverage offered by their employers is extremely expensive and has weak benefits. This is a huge problem for these workers, who face very high rates of on-the-job injury and illness. It also exacerbates the workforce crisis; studies show that strong benefits are the key to retention. Employers can't provide high-quality benefits because of their small risk pools and inadequate funding. Oregon has addressed this problem through an innovative structure called the Essential Workforce Healthcare Trust. Washington can replicate this model by leveraging state funding and a large risk pool to provide high-quality benefits across the nursing home industry.

APPRENTICESHIP

- ❑ **Responsible Bidders in Public Construction** — (SB 5133) — This legislation would include training agent status as part of responsible bidder criteria to expand apprenticeship opportunities..

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

- ❑ **PERC Cards: Digital Union Signatures** (see front)
- ❑ **Legislative Staff Collective Bargaining** — In 2022, the Legislature passed a law removing the prohibition for certain legislative staff for collective bargaining. A new bill seeks to clarify bargaining units and what can and cannot be bargained and by whom.
- ❑ **WFSE Interpreters/Procurement**
- ❑ **Interest Arbitration for Public Safety Telecommunicators** (SB 5808)
- ❑ **Interest Arbitration for Residents and Fellows**

EDUCATION

- ❑ **Education Support Professional (ESP) Wages** — In Washington, all students should attend schools with engaging lessons, clean and healthy buildings, and well supported and stable staffing. This is only possible when Washington adequately funds all school staff positions, from bus drivers who picks up students to start the day, to the nutrition services and custodial staff that ensure a full meal and clean facilities, to the paraeducator who works one-on-one with students. The state must increase wages for these education support professionals to alleviate chronic shortages and constant turnover in these critical roles. The state must also increase the number of ESP staff funded in its prototypical school model to ensure that

schools have adequate staffing to meet student needs.

- ❑ **Fully Fund Supports for Students with Disabilities** – Educators need additional resources to support students in a time when students’ behaviors more frequently disrupt learning and raise safety concerns for the student exhibiting the behavior, classmates, and educators. The Legislature must address the unmet needs of students by providing state-level systemic increases in staffing and professional development to support students before they experience behavioral crises and to provide pathways to success for all students.

LABOR VOICE

- ❑ **Voting Rights for Labor Representatives** (Public Transit Board) Public Transportation Benefit Area governing boards have included a non-voting labor representative for many years. This bill would simply turn the non-voting PTBA labor representative position into a full voting member to give them a legitimate voice, while maintaining the exclusion from executive sessions when discussing negotiations with labor organizations.

RETIREMENT

- ❑ **Plan 1 COLA** – Plan 1 (PERS 1 and TRS 1) retirees no longer receive automatic COLAs. To prevent retirees on fixed incomes from losing additional purchasing power, the Legislature needs to provide a benefit increase in 2024. This action will keep retired public workers in their homes and able to afford health care and food.
- ❑ **Increase state support for PEBB retiree health insurance** – Retired public workers are being priced out of PEBB health insurance plans. The state currently subsidizes 50% of PEBB retiree health insurance premiums, capped at \$183 per month. The \$183 cap, which was set in 2009, needs to be eliminated or increased to keep up with skyrocketing health care costs.

BUDGET ITEMS

- ❑ Indoor health infrastructure for schools
- ❑ Housing development (\$4B)
- ❑ Behavioral health (\$1B)
- ❑ Transportation budget (\$80M)
- ❑ Underground economy (\$500K/biennium, one-time) to staff task legislative task force
- ❑ Fire protection sprinkler system contractors (about \$400K biennially for two biennia, then self-funding via penalties and fees)
- ❑ Electrical apprenticeships – Pushing for the remaining \$6M
- ❑ Teacher residency program (\$7M)
- ❑ Graduate new childcare providers and maintain technical assistance and shared services (\$5.4M)
- ❑ Increase offerings for child care outside standard hours by increasing the WCCC bonus to \$500 (\$8M)
- ❑ Near-site Childcare Facility Pilots for construction workers (\$450K)
- ❑ Paid Family and Medical Leave (\$8.2M) spending authorization – 48 FTE for intake and approvals and 49 FTEs for development and implementation of statutory requirements
- ❑ Increasing Access to Unemployment Insurance for Apprentices
- ❑ Supports for Incarcerated Pre-Apprentices (\$240K)
- ❑ Department of Corrections/Solitary Retrofit
- ❑ Prison Ventilation Upgrades
- ❑ Nursing Home Healthcare Pilot
- ❑ Child welfare/DCYF/mental health
- ❑ Dedicated Funding for Registered Apprenticeship
- ❑ Women’s Commission Program Staff (420K/year, ongoing)

In addition, the Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO will support other legislation championed by its affiliated unions on a range of issues to promote economic opportunity and justice.

Union members comprise 18% of our workforce, making Washington the third most unionized state in the nation. Widely considered to be our state’s “voice of labor,” the **Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO** is the state’s largest labor organization. It represents some 600 unions with more than 500,000 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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