



2021 PROTEC17 Washington State Legislative Session Report

This was a challenging Legislative session to say the least, but PROTEC17 showed up and made sure our voices were heard (virtually, of course) and have some real victories to celebrate! Due to public health restrictions on gathering, all meetings and communication for the regular 105-day session were done online. Additionally, the forecast for a robust budget looked bleak due to the pandemic shortfalls and calls for cuts and austerity measures.

Already delayed transportation and infrastructure projects had been put on hold due to the unforeseen budget impacts, public health has been underfunded for years and demonstrated a need for funding more than ever before, and our upside-down tax code needed serious revisions. We focused on these priorities, as well as police reform and community safety, health and safety protections for all working people, and mitigating COVID harms and further cuts on jobs and benefits to PROTEC17 union members. Despite the challenges, major victories were won this session for working people and PROTEC17 members, including a new \$59 billion budget, a tax on excessive wealth, an end to furloughs for State employees, and public health funding.

Transportation Infrastructure – \$11.8 billion in funding for the current-revenue transportation budget passed through Senate Bill 5165. It will provide funding to Washington State Department of Transportation, State Patrol, State Ferries and other transportation agencies. This includes \$5.8 billion on much needed capital projects that many PROTEC17 members help design and build across our state, including the improvements to State Routes, Interstates, bridge infrastructure to maintain safety on several highly used bridges, and replacing fish blocking road culverts for fish and stream ecology.

Unfortunately, the House and Senate remained far apart in negotiations on a transportation revenue package, although there is some discussion about a fall special session in order to pass a package. Good news to help pave the way for a potential package to come together is the successful passing of the [Carbon Cap and Clean Fuels legislation](#). This legislation is tied to successful passing of a revenue package and would go into effect in January 2023. It's a positive step forward to provide a cap on greenhouse gas emissions, and a system to increasingly-tax the biggest polluters, if it can make it through the likely Court challenges. Funds generated will go towards renewable energy projects and transit funding, among others.

Strengthening Public Health – Public health funding has been long neglected but this session the pandemic amplified a spotlight on the societal need for public health and its essential support for communities. Additionally, we teamed up with other community allies to push for and support HB 1152, which provides additional Health Board structure, transparency and oversight. This bill was successful in passing. Most importantly, the Public Health budget in Washington state was approved by both Chambers in the final days of session. The funding provides \$147 million for Foundational Public Health Services (FPHS) for the 2021 – 2023 biennium, and \$148 million per year – **ongoing** – beginning in 2024. This is a result of the groundswell of support and pressure applied by labor unions, regional and county health districts, and many union members and public health workers' engagement during this session to offer support. Thank you! This is truly a victory for all.

Investing In Our Communities – The excessive wealth tax, a.k.a. "capital gains tax" passed! Washington law makers, with decades of mounting pressure from labor unions and community groups, passed Senate Bill 5096 which will enact a 7% tax on capital gains that exceed \$250,000 per year. Retirement cash outs and real estate sales profits are exempt, but the revenue is still forecast to bring in approximately \$145 million annually. The funds will go mainly towards early learning programs and education. Most importantly, this legislation will help begin the reversal of a regressive tax code which for years has had the lowest earning Washingtonians paying the highest percentage of their income to taxes.



The Working Families Tax Exemption – This legislation (HB 1297) passed and will also assist in reversing the regressive tax system in our state. The new law will allow low-income families to receive a larger tax refund or exemption to make up for some of the disproportionate amount of taxes they pay through sales tax.

Community Safety and Police Accountability – While PROTEC17 tracked legislation and was supportive of policy that will help to address the history of violence against communities of color, the sweep of reform measures that passed is largely owed to the mobilization efforts and powerful testimony of families and communities that have endured this violence. We are grateful for their leadership. We applaud the passing of Senate Bill 5051 which will create stronger state oversight of police officers for gross misconduct and unethical behavior. House Bill 1054 also passed and is a big step in the right direction that will help regulate police tactics. This legislation bans no-knock warrants, like the kind utilized in the fatal shooting of Breonna Taylor in her home, and places restraints on certain military equipment, as well as limits police use of tear gas on the public. It also bans choke holds and neck restraints among other lethal tactics. Several other reform measures were passed including SB 5066 which requires police to intervene when they witness other officers using excessive force, and SB 5259 that will allow the State to collect use-of-force data on police officers.

Mitigate Austerity Measures and Support Union Jobs – Over the past year, the pandemic has been detrimental to so many who have lost loved ones and suffered illness and hardship. With economic impacts on just about every facet of society, it's also created a serious threat to all working people. One of our key focal points and priorities was to mitigate further harm to working people and PROTEC17 members. We are pleased to have pushed back against cuts which resulted in no furloughs included in the budget for PROTEC17 union members working for the State of Washington. State members have been forced to reduce their hours of work without pay for nearly a year. While there are still negotiations that need to occur to eliminate these furloughs from our State contracts, we have already been working with management to do this, and we are eager to see this win through for PROTEC17 members working for Washington State.

We also mitigated HB 1207, which as originally proposed, would have allowed for ongoing online renewal of licensing documents as well as posed serious safety impacts. Through PROTEC17 Department of Licensing members coming together to voice concerns, testifying at the committee hearings, and speaking with legislators, we were able to mitigate this legislation to create safety mechanisms, and establish a set time-period for online renewal in an effort to catch up on pandemic induced back-log.

When the pandemic hit and working people were incurring hours reductions and furloughs, retirement was also at risk, resulting in potentially long-lasting negative effects. We quickly offered support for SB 5021 which provides that certain public pensions will not be reduced as a result of the reductions during the pandemic and through 2023 for workers participating in an unemployment insurance shared work program.

Additionally, the Worker Protection Act passed, HB 1076, expanding the legal tools working people have at their disposal to enforce and protect our rights.

What began as a somewhat dismal and uncertain session turned out to be quite remarkable. We were able to help usher in success on some level for all of our legislative priorities this year. And, along with a host of other positive legislation passed, it might be held up as one of the most productive sessions for working people in quite some time. It goes to show that even with the obstacles of not being able to gather in person, and confronting the challenges of an austere economic forecast, when working people unite, we can prevail. There is still work to do, but the future is looking much brighter for Washingtonians as a result of this unique session. To gather more information, feel free to read the agency summary of the full 1102-page budget document [HERE](#). Thank you to all the members who contacted your legislators – it makes a difference! You make a difference.