



PROTEC17 2022 Washington State Legislative Session Report

For the second year, the Washington State Legislative session was held virtually. Due to public health restrictions on gatherings prompted by the Covid-19 Delta and Omicron variants, all meetings and communications for the short 59 day session were held virtually for the public with some legislators and staff meeting in person on an as needed basis. While this presented many challenges it also provided opportunities to engage our members in a unique and powerful way.

Our legislative priorities this year focused on three key policy areas, public health funding, generating resources for all through fair taxation to generate public revenue, and robust investments in Washington state transportation and infrastructure. In addition to these goals, we also ran our first bill, **SB 5875** sponsored by Senator Joe Nguyen (D-34). This legislation includes our DOL Licensing Services Representatives 1 and 2 members in the previous HELSA (Health Emergency Labor Standards Act) legislation which would provide hazard pay and other benefits. We are proud to report that this bill passed the legislature by a wide margin and was signed into law by Governor Inslee on March 31st 2022. A special thanks to the members and staff who assisted in this effort by drafting the bill, signing in PRO to its multiple hearings, and testifying before the Senate and House labor committees.

Public Health Funding - The legislature took sweeping action on many public health issues this session. While there is still much work to be done in several key areas, significant wins were made on a number of issues. PROTEC17 advocated and supported many of these policy wins for public health. The supplemental budget includes \$90 million to address the physical and social emotional needs of K-12 students, \$50 million to expand access to broadband, and \$46 million for health care workforce training initiatives. In addition to these investments the budget also allocates \$100 million from the Coronavirus State Fiscal Recovery Fund for one-time payments to community-based Medicaid-contracting providers. Approximately \$71 million is slated to support nursing and health care education programs at four-year, community and technical colleges. The funding will also support apprenticeship grants for licensed nurses who will specifically work in long-term care settings.

The legislature also passed SB 5532 which would establish a prescription drug affordability board, and HB 1866, which will create the Apple Health and Homes Program. This bill seeks to reduce long-term homelessness and unnecessary institutionalization for people with health-related disabilities by linking health care and housing to create supportive housing, an evidence based intervention that provides dignified support to these households and stability to communities.

PROTEC17 was also supportive of a number of bills that did not pass this session but are expected to be revisited in 2023 such as SB 5911 which would have provided health care hazard pay bonuses to certain health care employees, and HB 1868 which sought to improve worker safety and patient care in healthcare facilities by addressing staffing needs, overtime, meal and rest breaks.

Generating Resources For All Through Fair Taxation - Using state tax revenues that have come in faster than forecasted and remaining federal COVID relief dollars, legislators passed a supplemental budget on party line votes that increases funding for important priorities, including behavioral health, housing, and a host of other programs. They largely stood up to the pressure for across-the-board tax cuts, rejecting an austerity approach that would have caused lasting harm to



individuals and communities. While the Legislature did reduce some business taxes, they ultimately allowed other measures to “die”, like HB 2018 which proposed a Labor Day sales tax holiday.

Notably the budget transfers \$2 billion in general tax revenues usually used for the operating budget into the transportation budget, thereby avoiding an increase in the gas tax. Legislators also reduced taxes for many small businesses, data centers and the film industry.

We have also been tracking the judicial progress of the Capital Gains Tax which passed the legislature last session. The measure which would impose a 7% tax on an individual’s long term capital gains exceeding \$250,000 is currently in legal limbo after being struck down by a Douglas County Superior Court judge in late February of this year. Attorney General Bob Ferguson recently submitted a direct appeal to the state Supreme Court.

Transportation / Infrastructure Funding - The legislature passed the largest transportation spending road map in state history, [Move Ahead WA](#). The more than \$17 billion transportation package will be implemented over the next 16 years. The revenue and spending package funds new spans over the Columbia River, wider highways, four new electric ferries, bus rapid transit expansions, free fares for youth, fish friendly culverts, and new bike trails and pedestrian bridges.

Some of the largest commitments in the package, \$7.2 billion, will be allocated to engineering, concrete and asphalt production, roadway expansion, preservation and maintenance. The package also includes major investments in green transportation projects in an effort to push Washington closer to becoming carbon-neutral. The projects include things such as transit operating subsidies, bus lane development, electrification of transit fleets, and sidewalk improvements totalling to more than \$3 billion. This also includes a \$150 million allocation to begin developing a high speed rail system that would span between Portland, Seattle, and Vancouver B.C. This is a significant win for many PROTEC17 members who help design and build bridges, roads and interstate improvements throughout Washington.

To resource the package, lawmakers used a combination of funds from the New Surface Transportation Reauthorization and Electrification provisions in the federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. Additional funding will also come from the federal Climate Commitment Act and One-Time State Operating Budget Support. The fact that the package is covered with the absence of a raise in gas taxes is notable, and was a high priority for Chair of the Senate Transportation Committee Chair Marco Liias (D-Mukilteo). While this spending package is indeed robust, continued provisions, adjustments and augmentations will be made during the 2023 Legislature.

While this session may have been a short one, there were many great wins for working people, their families, and members of PROTEC17. As we continue to navigate largely virtual spaces our members and staff showed up in significant ways to make our collective voice heard throughout the halls of the state capitol. As we wind down from the session, we look forward to building back up for next session, and will continue to work alongside other unions and coalitions to demand the change members and our communities deserve. Thank you again to all the members and staff who engaged and advocated with us this session, we look forward to working with you again in 2023. If you have any questions or want to get involved, please contact our political director Brandon Hersey at brandon@protec17.org.