

insight

A NEWSLETTER FOR MEMBERS & FRIENDS

OF PROTEC17

Winter
2026
Vol 31
No. 1



Meet your 2025
PROTEC17 leadership award winners!



On the Cover:

At the fall meeting of PROTEC17's Regional Executive Committee (REC), leadership awards were given to members who went above and beyond to support their coworkers in 2025. Read more about the REC and our winners on page 5. ■

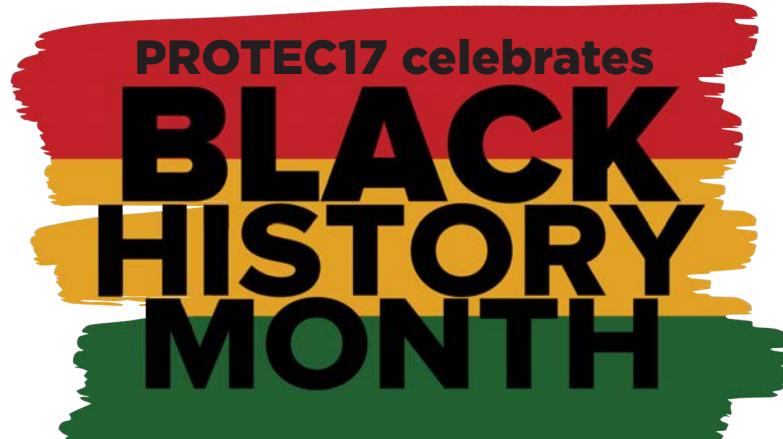
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Our union is a place of belonging

I

mmigrants play a critical role in powering our union – as Stewards, staff, leaders, and rank-and-file members. And what's true for PROTEC17 is true of the nation as a whole. One in five U.S. workers is an immigrant, spanning every sector of our economy.

Immigrants account for 25 percent of new businesses, generate \$1.7 trillion in new economic activity, and pay \$652 billion in taxes. Most importantly, *more than one in seven union members is an immigrant.*

The labor movement and the immigrant rights movement are more than intertwined, they are one and the same. The same fear and greed that fuels mass deportations and violence against immigrants also guides the anti-worker movement, creating an environment where employers feel that they can violate workers' rights with impunity. The terror instilled by raids and targeting means that fewer people report crimes, visit a doctor, send their kids to school, form a union in their workplace, or participate in union activities – all of which undermines the dignity, health, well-being, and safety of our union and our society.

Right now, we are in a critical moment to join together to demand safety, respect, and civility for our immigrant siblings in our workplaces and in our communities. This call to action is what it means to be part of the labor movement. We have the ability to take action within our own union with our new strategic planning priorities providing collective guidance and direction. These three priorities – *defending careers in public service, strengthening political policy and activism and fostering belonging and inclusion* – illustrate that PROTEC17 members have not only prioritized belonging and inclusion, but are willing to take action to be a place where everyone belongs, no matter where we are from, what country we were born in, or our immigration status.

So, what does this look like in action?

There are many things you can do in this moment to create spaces of belonging and inclusion, to strengthen worker policies, and to defend public services, like: *welcoming new hires in your department to our union; inviting colleagues to union meetings; working in your communities to support the most vulnerable; unionizing workers - particularly immigrant workers - because we know a unionized workplace provides extra protection; attending trainings and workshops to learn more about your rights; demanding that the public agencies where we work do not allow ICE agents on premises to detain and arrest fellow workers; and demonstrating in the streets through protests, solidarity walk-outs, and collective actions.* You can visit our website to see what opportunities to participate are coming up: protec17.org/events.

As we reflect on and prepare for our work moving forward – guided by our strategic plan – we are reminded that we don't need to look far to shape the future we envision. Our union can and must be a place where belonging is felt, safety is real, and dignity is upheld. Within our union, we must demand and create that space together, and push forward to create the change we know is possible.

In compassion and solidarity,

Karen



Karen Estevenin
Executive Director

PROTEC17 celebrates MLK Day 2026

Monday, Jan. 19 marked the 43rd annual Martin Luther King rally and march hosted by the Seattle MLK Organizing Coalition. Hundreds of people, including dozens of PROTEC17 members, attended the inspiring event at Garfield High School, followed by a march to downtown Seattle.

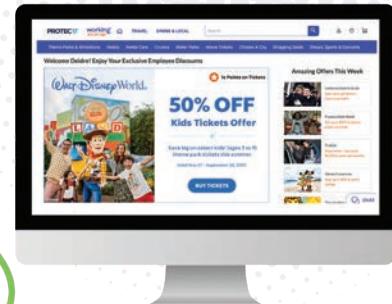
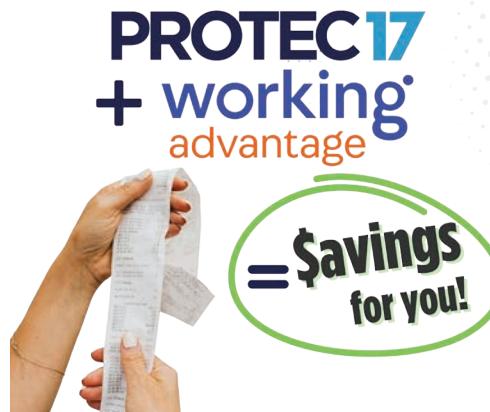
This year's theme was 'Where do we go from here?' -- the title of King's 1967 book. In the book, he warned that America stood at a dangerous crossroads between racism, poverty, militarism, and division -- and he challenged Americans to decide whether we descend into chaos, or build a community grounded in justice, democracy, and love. The organizers of this year's event chose this theme as it resonates with many crises our country still faces today.

To learn more about PROTEC17's anti-racist work and events, visit: protec17.org/racial-justice. ■



Newly retired PROTEC17 Seattle member-leader Ariska Thompson with Executive Director Karen Estevenin at this year's MLK Rally.

PROTEC17 member benefits include discounts, professional development funds, and more



To create your account, visit: workingadvantage.com
Use access code: PROTEC17

You already know that standing together with your colleagues in a union creates strong wages, benefits, and working conditions, plus a sense of solidarity and community. But there are also many other tangible benefits to being a PROTEC17 member - like our scholarship, professional development fund, and our member discount program!

In its 15 years in existence, the PROTEC17 Scholarship Program has awarded more than \$75,000 to the children, grandchildren, and dependents of dues-paying members in the form of two \$5,000 college scholarships each year. The application for the 2026 Scholarship will be announced this spring via email, on our social media channels, and on our member benefits webpage. The deadline to submit the scholarship application and supporting materials is typically July 31.

For members who are pursuing job-related coursework and training, the PROTEC17 Professional Development Fund reimburses dues-paying members up to \$200 each calendar year for qualifying expenses. While we cannot reimburse for travel or student loans, members have been approved for things like conference registration fees, continuing education coursework, professional organization

dues, educational books, and more. You can find the full details and the application -- which is now open for 2026 -- at protec17.org/benefits.

Last year, we added to our expanding list of member benefits to include a discount program for dues-paying members through Working Advantage. This new program gives members special access to discounts on travel, tickets, dining, shopping, services, and more when they register through the Working Advantage website. This reputable company has worked with unions like Teamsters and SEIU to offer hundreds of discounts on things that working people use everyday.

To sign up for the PROTEC17 Member Discount Program, visit workingadvantage.com and use our access code: PROTEC17 to create an account. Participation is completely optional and on an opt-in basis -- we do not give Working Advantage any member information.

We continue to explore other options to bring additional benefits to dues-paying members -- including our new member card (see back cover) which should have arrived at your home address! If you have other ideas for member benefits, please reach out to future@protec17.org. ■

Find more news on our website: www.protec17.org/news

Regional Executive Committee takes bold action, celebrates leaders and accomplishments at fall meeting

On Sat., Oct. 19, the PROTEC17 Regional Executive Committee (REC) — our union's policy-making body — convened in-person at the Museum of Flight in Tukwila to conduct the business of our union. As part of the twice-yearly event, the fall REC meeting highlights our union's accomplishments and victories for the year, and celebrates member-leaders with our annual leadership awards.

The meeting opened with a welcome and tribal land acknowledgement by PROTEC17 President Rachael Brooks. Delegates also heard a year-end budget review from Executive Board Secretary-Treasurer Mason Emrys.

The theme of this fall's meeting was 'Meeting the Moment' meant to inspire us to keep going during these unprecedented times. Delegates heard a 'state-of-the-union' update from Executive Director Karen Estevenin that emphasized the many accomplishments

that we made throughout our 2023-2025 Strategic Plan to create a strong union identity and culture, build our political power and community connections, and strengthen member leader programs and opportunities. Delegates then heard a recap of the planning process and survey results that helped to shape the draft 2026-2028 Strategic Plan, and voted to adopt the new priorities. You can read more about our next Strategic Plan on p. 6.

"We have accomplished great things together over the last three years thanks to the dedication of our leaders, including everyone in this room," said Executive Director Estevenin. "I'm excited to see what we'll accomplish during the next three year plan."

After a short break, delegates participated in an interactive workshop to discuss the most important issues we're facing as a union in this moment, and the role of member leaders in addressing these issues.

Following the workshop, delegates heard from King County members Jessy Marie Hardy and Katie Schneier about a resolution to align Washington pension funds with our union values. After discussion, the body voted to adopt it.

The fall REC meeting also includes the presentation of awards that recognize members for their important contributions to building worker power. This year's winners include: David Halsell (Organizer Extraordinaire, City of Seattle), Tolyn Seng (For the People – Advocacy, King County Public Health), Joseph Opoku (Doesn't Need Coffee - Activist, WSDOT), Jeremy Ward (Union Through and Through, King County), and Tina Kendell (Rising Star – New Leader, Clark County).

Congrats to all of our winners, and thank you to all of the REC delegates for all you do for our union! The next REC meeting will be held virtually on Sat., March 7, 2026. Delegates should expect to receive more information shortly. ■



Clockwise from upper left: Tina Kendell and Union Rep. Rachel Whiteside; Executive Director Karen Estevenin with Joseph Opoku; Organizing Director Jessica Olivas with David Halsell; PROTEC17 REC delegates and staff at the Museum of Flight; King County members Jessy Hardy and Katie Schneier.

PROTEC17 2026-2028 Strategic Plan to focus on defending public service, belonging, and activism

Last fall, PROTEC17 began a process to create a new Strategic Plan for 2026-2028 that will guide us over the next three years. As part of that process, thousands of members gave their feedback via a membership-wide survey, Chapter meetings, focus groups, emails, one-on-ones, and more. The Regional Executive Committee (REC) also participated in an exercise to provide additional input for the new plan, as did the PROTEC17 Executive Board.

Since then, the Strategic Planning Committee has been combing through all of this input to form new priorities, goals, and objectives for our union. Several themes emerged during this process, and three priorities rose to the surface. They are: 1) Defend careers in public service 2) Strengthen our political policy and activism work, and 3) Foster connection and belonging.

Many members expressed their pride in the work that we did in our last strategic plan, and wanted to continue to build on this momentum. It is important to note that within all of these priorities, the committee will continually be looking through a racial justice lens to create goals and objectives under each priority.

A draft plan was brought to the REC in October and was adopted by the delegate body (read more on p. 5). The planning committee will now move forward with developing the details of the plan, with measurable goals and outcomes.

Our organization's first strategic plan was created back in 2019, shortly after the arrival of Executive Director Karen Estevenin. As part of that process, thousands of members gave their feedback and with all of that input, PROTEC17 developed a mission statement, a vision statement, and three high-level priorities that guided our goals and objectives from 2020-2022.

These morphed and changed as we moved through the early years of COVID-19 pandemic.

In the 2023-2025 Strategic Plan, we focused on three main priorities: creating a strong union identity and culture; building our political power and community connections; and strengthening member leadership programs and opportunities. Big projects like our first ever 'Solidarity Summit,' our 'Proud to Be PROTEC17' video and campaign, and the expansion of our member-led political group - the PROTEC17 Workers' Roundtable (PWR) - came out of this plan.

For 2026-2028, the committee is looking forward to creating and achieving new objectives under each of our new priorities. As always, if you have additional ideas, information, or feedback on our priorities as we strive to reach our newest goals, you can reach out to future@protec17.org. ■

2026-2028 Strategic Priorities

- **Defend careers in public service**
- **Strengthen our political policy and activism work**
- **Foster connection and belonging**

Have input for our next plan? Email: future@protec17.org

Know Your Labor History, Know Your Rights!

What are Weingarten Rights?

Based on feedback in last fall's Strategic Planning survey, we are introducing a new column in Insight to highlight Labor history and the rights you have as union members. This feature will serve to educate new union members, as well as refresh long-time members, about pivotal moments in the Labor Movement, PROTEC17 History, and Labor Rights. Enjoy!

What are Weingarten Rights?

One of the most important rights a union-represented employee has is the right to union representation in a meeting that may result in discipline. This is known as the Weingarten Right.

These meetings can also be referred to as fact-findings, investigatory meetings, or Weingarten meetings. If you ever find yourself in a meeting that you think will result in discipline of any sort, you have the right to stop the meeting and request that a Union Representative or Union Steward be present. Your union representative can provide guidance that will put you in a stronger position than going alone.

While union-represented employees always have this right, many employers won't automatically inform you - you must request it. If you invoke your Weingarten Rights, which you can do at any time in your meeting with management, and your employer denies the request and continues the meeting, it is considered an Unfair Labor Practice, and we can file charges afterwards. Most often, employers will delay or reschedule the meeting for when your representative can attend. To avoid the possibility of being also accused of insubordination for failing to participate in the meeting, the best guidance is to "comply now, grieve later".

The Weingarten Right does NOT apply to non-disciplinary meetings such as discussions about job duties, performance evaluations, work schedules, etc., unless

"If this discussion could in any way lead to my being disciplined or terminated, I respectfully request that my Steward or Union Representative be present at the meeting. If they are unavailable, then I'd like to reschedule the meeting for when they can be present."

the discussion changes to an investigation that could lead to disciplinary action.

If you are scheduled for an investigatory meeting, your union representative will want to talk with you privately before the meeting begins so that they know the situation and any mitigating factors or information you might want to raise. In the meeting, your representative may give you advice on how to answer a question, ask for clarifications, raise objections, or other support.

The History of Weingarten Rights

Weingarten Rights were established by the Supreme Court in a 1975 case between the *National Labor Relations Board (NLRB)* and *J. Weingarten, Inc.* - a supermarket chain. At the center of the case was a sales clerk in Houston, Texas named Leura Collins.

In June 1972, Collins was falsely accused of stealing chicken from the store and was interrogated at length by a manager. In that meeting, her repeated requests to have her Union Steward present were denied. Collins was in tears by the end of the interview, proclaiming that the only thing she had ever taken from the store was the free lunch she was entitled to in her contract.

However, according to the company, the free lunch policy did not apply to that Weingarten's location, only Collins' previous store. Based on her answers, a statement was drawn up that asserted that Collins owed the company \$160 for the lunches she had taken. Collins refused to

sign the statement. In addition, she was instructed by the store manager not to tell anyone about the interview, but Collins immediately relayed the full details of the conversation to her union representatives, who then filed an unfair labor practice charge with the NLRB.

In its investigation, the NLRB found that taking a free lunch was a near universal practice among employees at Collins' store - including the manager - and that no policy to the contrary had ever been communicated. The Supreme Court would later affirm a statutory right to union representation in investigative interviews under the National Labor Relations Act, which "guarantees the right of employees to act in concert for mutual aid and protection." In other words, the Court found that in this instance, the presence of a union representative during a possibly consequential interview was needed for concerted support.

Weingarten Rights express some of the most foundational values of unions - protection and solidarity. They would later be confirmed for unionized public sector employees as well by the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania.

On Your Membership Card!

You likely received your new PROTEC17 membership card in the mail in late January/early February. On the back of the card, you'll find the text of a Weingarten statement to request representation. This way, it will always be in your wallet if you ever need it! ■

2025 Organizing Report

PROTEC17 grew by nearly 400 members in new classifications

In 2025, newly organized PROTEC17 members faced challenges head-on and made it known that we are a force to be reckoned with! In many of our external organizing campaigns, new members persevered in forming their union and in negotiating their first contracts despite obstacles and set backs, building unity and solidarity in the process.

In total, we organized 23 new classifications resulting in 383 new members joining our union at City of Seattle, King County, City of Portland, Sound Transit, and Pierce Transit – a new employer to PROTEC17. Our union's expansion into other transit agencies in the region is a natural fit given the thousands of public sector transportation workers we represent at the state, county, and city levels; and transit workers are seeking out PROTEC17 so that they can be in solidarity with other union members in their field.

Over the last year, Sound Transit workers in the *Community Engagement Division, Permit Administration Division, Environmental & Sustainability Division, plus Fare Ambassadors, Fare Ambassador Supervisors, and Transit Systems Electronics Technicians and Coordinators* were recognized by the Public Employee Relations Commission (PERC) as unionizing with PROTEC17. At Pierce Transit, we welcomed *IT Analysts*.

Contract negotiations at both of these transit agencies has not been easy, with employers that have been less than union-friendly. This is especially true for our newest members at Sound Transit who have been met with resistance as they continue negotiating their first contract, and have taken escalating actions to show their employer they are united – including showing up en masse to the Sound Transit Board meeting in November, pictured.



PROTEC17 members who are organizing at Sound Transit and actively bargaining their first contract were a show of force at the Sound Transit Executive Board meeting in November.

At City of Seattle, City of Portland, and King County, our organizing efforts have been much less contentious due to our long-standing established presence at these employers.

At King County, we now represent *Functional Analysts* in DCHS, *Contract Specialists* in the Facilities Management Division, *Project/Program Managers* in Finance and Administrative Services, and *all employees* in the Safety, Security, and Quality Assurance (SSQA) Division.

The City of Seattle – our union's largest Chapter – continues to grow as well. Last year, we welcomed members from many different classifications. These include: *Public Relations Specialists; Fire Protection Engineers; Management Systems Analysts (Seattle Public Utilities); Dispute Resolution Mediator and Strategic Advisor 2's (Office of Civil Rights); Recreation Program Coordinator Seniors (Parks); Community Development Specialists, Administrative*

Staff Assistants and others in the Office of Economic Development; Community Crisis Responders and Supervisors; Strategic Advisors and other positions in the Office of Housing; and Shop Operation Supervisors in the Finance and Administrative Services department.

In Portland, the *Capital Project Manager III's* joined their I and II colleagues in PROTEC17 to grow their collective union power, which is especially important as the City of Portland is currently in contract negotiations.

The mission of our Organizing department is to maintain, grow, and strengthen the power of our union through strategic campaigns to increase our density internally, and externally in our industries. If you have unrepresented colleagues who are interested in joining our union, please reach out to Organizing Director Jessica Olivas at jessica@protec17.org. ■

To learn more about union organizing, visit: protec17.org/join-us

PROTEC17 EVENT CALENDAR

JANUARY

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

Jan. 6 - PROTEC17 Presents: Union 101!
 Jan. 6 - Portland Chapter Meeting
 Jan. 7 - Steward Training - Part 1
 Jan. 8 - Seattle Chapter Meeting
 Jan. 12 - Seattle Chapter In-Office Grievance Action Meeting
 Jan. 13 - Future of Work Member Action Committee Meeting
 Jan. 14 - Steward Training - Part 2
 Jan. 14 - WSDOT Chapter Meeting
 Jan. 14 - Tacoma Chapter Meeting
 Jan. 15 - King County Steward Meeting
Jan. 19 - Martin Luther King Jr. Day
 Jan. 21 - Portland Chapter Meeting
 Jan. 22 - Seattle Steward Meeting
 Jan. 28 - King County Chapter Meeting
 Jan. 29 - Sound Transit Contract Action Team Meeting

FEBRUARY

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28

Feb. 3 - Portland Chapter Meeting
 Feb. 4 - Steward Training - Part 1
 Feb. 5 - WA DOL Revenue Auditors Meeting
 Feb. 11 - Steward Training - Part 2
 Feb. 11 - WSDOT Chapter Meeting
 Feb. 11 - Tacoma Chapter Meeting
 Feb. 12 - Seattle Chapter Meeting
Feb. 16 - Presidents' Day
 Feb. 18 - Portland Chapter Meeting
 Feb. 19 - King County Steward Meeting
 Feb. 25 - King County Chapter Meeting
 Feb. 26 - Seattle Steward Meeting
 Feb. 26 - Sound Transit Contract Action Team Meeting

MARCH

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

March 3 - Portland Chapter Meeting
 March 4 - Steward Training - Part 1
 March 11 - Steward Training - Part 2
 March 11 - WSDOT Chapter Meeting
 March 11 - Tacoma Chapter Meeting
 March 12 - Seattle Chapter Meeting
 March 18 - Portland Chapter Meeting
 March 19 - King County Steward Meeting
 March 25 - King County Chapter Meeting
 March 26 - Seattle Steward Meeting
 March 26 - Sound Transit Contract Action Team Meeting

This is not an exhaustive list of events, as things get added all the time!
Please visit protec17.org/events/ for current listings and logistics.

2026 Oregon Legislative Session Preview:

Transportation revenue, permitting, and more

On Feb. 2, the Oregon legislature will begin its 2026 short session. Lasting only five weeks, legislators will have limited time to conduct business, though several major issues have emerged that will require considerable attention.

Following an extremely fractious process in the spring and summer to pass a funding package for transportation, anti-tax groups successfully gathered enough signatures to refer some provisions of the 2025 revenue bill to the voters. This had the impact of delaying implementation of these taxes for at least a year, which puts state transportation funding back in much the same place as it was in when this discussion began in the winter of 2025.

Governor Kotek is now advocating for the legislature to repeal its own bill and to make a second attempt to shore up transportation revenues. PROTEC17 will be tracking progress on this effort and what it will mean for local jurisdictions, as much of the attention in recent weeks has been around the Oregon Department of



Transportation, ignoring the impacts to cities and counties.

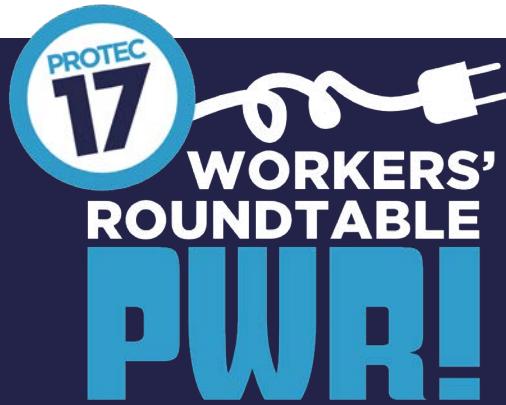
Additionally, the legislature is planning to consider bills related to addressing Federal tax cuts and changes and how these impact Oregon revenue. The Labor and Workforce committee will be discussing several subjects including child labor protections, construction labor contractors, and educator collective bargaining rights around class size and safety protocols.

Finally, there is continued interest in the legislature for addressing construction permitting times – this is an issue that

we are concerned may have inadvertent negative impacts on PROTEC17 members involved with permitting, and we will closely follow these conversations.

We will continue tracking developments in the Oregon legislature throughout session and will send relevant information and opportunities to engage to our membership as the year unfolds.

If you have any questions or comments, or to find out about such opportunities, please contact PROTEC17's Research Director and Oregon Legislative Advocate Elliot Levin at elliott@protec17.org. ■



We are a group of PROTEC17 members from across WA and OR who help make change at the policy level - and we have fun doing it! Visit our website or contact Political Director Mark Watson at mark@protec17.org or 206-328-7321 ext. 133 to learn more!



protec17.org/pwr

2026 Washington Legislative Priorities



The 2026 Washington state legislative session began on January 12. While it's a short, 60-day session, we've got an action-packed agenda based on several priorities that will help improve the work and lives of PROTEC17 members and their families.

Public Health & Local Government Flexibility

House Bill (HB) 1870 has been introduced alongside its companion bill in the Senate (SB 5709) to provide a practical, locally-driven solution for public health funding by allowing counties greater flexibility in how clinic funding is structured and sustained. This flexibility enables counties to better align resources with on-the-ground needs without requiring new state appropriations.

As a union representing public health workers across the state, PROTEC17 supports HB 1870/SB5709 because it aims to strengthen the long-term stability of county public health clinics that serve as a safety net for vulnerable populations, while also protecting frontline public health workers to ensure there is continuity of care amid workforce shortages and budget volatility. This bill will also improve counties' ability to respond quickly to emerging public health threats and community health priorities, reducing the reliance on emergency or short-term funding mechanisms that undermine service planning and retention.

Investing in flexible, sustainable public health funding is both fiscally responsible and essential to protecting community health. This bill ensures counties can maintain strong public health systems while safeguarding the professional workforce that delivers these critical services.



Progressive Revenue to Protect Essential Services

Washington faces ongoing budget challenges that threaten essential services and the public workforce. PROTEC17 supports progressive revenue options, including a millionaire tax, to protect essential public services and public sector jobs from service cuts and layoffs. By ensuring that the wealthiest Washingtonians contribute fairly, we can secure stable, long-term funding for state and local government programs.

Technology & Worker Protections

Artificial intelligence (AI) is being introduced in government operations across the State with the potential to reshape how public sector services are delivered. Workers should have a voice in how these tools are implemented.

PROTEC17 supports HB 1622/SB5422 to make AI deployment a mandatory subject of collective bargaining when it affects employment. This will support us in protecting jobs, working conditions, and professional discretion, while promoting responsible and transparent use of emerging technologies.

Paid Family & Medical Leave

Washington state's Paid Family & Medical Leave (PFML) program is one of

the most successful programs of its kind in the nation. PROTEC17 supports lawmakers to protect the long-term sustainability of PFML, reject rollbacks that would reduce access or benefits, and preserve the stability that PFML provides for both workers and employers.

Housing Affordability & Workforce Stability

The housing crisis directly impacts workforce recruitment, retention, and economic stability. HB 1687 is a pro-housing action that can be taken this session without requiring new state funding.

PROTEC17 supports HB 1687 to add social housing as a qualifying use under the Housing Cooperation Law, allowing flexibility from restrictive zoning and building codes, which will enable state and local governments to support the siting, development, and long-term maintenance of social housing. Through targeted, project-specific regulatory flexibility, social housing can lower development costs, while expanding permanently affordable housing across Washington – particularly as federal affordable housing funding faces deep cuts.

Transportation Funding

While the legislature passed a robust Transportation package last session, we will continue to monitor and assess transportation funding bills that commit to increased funding to preserve and maintain the State's infrastructure assets and to complete federally-mandated fish passage work, while at the same time balancing the need to direct investments toward completing new construction projects throughout the State. ■

For more information about this legislative session, please reach out to PROTEC17 Political Director Mark Watson at: mark@protec17.org

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Your *NEW!* PROTEC17 union membership card should have already arrived in your mailbox! This card is the direct result of member feedback from our last strategic plan to build and increase pride in PROTEC17 membership, and will be tied to additional member-exclusive benefits in the future.



Learn more at: protec17.org/benefits