Capitol News – Final Edition

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Melissa Johnson, Lobbyist

## General News

At 11:35 pm on Thursday, March 10th, the Legislature adjourned sine die (Latin phrase meaning “without a day to reconvene”). This session began in the darkness of the omicron surge and ended in optimism 24 hours and 25 minutes before the expiration of Washington’s indoor mask mandate. And yet, this session bore many of the same COVID-19 restrictions as last session, most notably the closure of offices to constituents and lobbyists wishing to meet with lawmakers and staff in person.

Majority Democrats came to Olympia this year with two high-profile priorities at the top of their list, fixes to the long-term care program and to police reforms passed last session. Both topics were addressed in short order. Additionally, for the second year in a row, leadership asked members to introduce no more than 7 new bills and chairs to limit the number of bills passed out of committee to ease the burden of a mostly virtual session. Democratic leadership also requested members limit the focus of their bills to “serve Washingtonians better, strengthen economic well-being, advance racial equality and justice, and address the climate crisis.”

In the end, this supplemental session was defined by the money flowing into the state, through higher-than-expected revenue and the continuation of federal COVID relief dollars. This is reflected in the supplemental operating budget approved on the last day of session. Spending $5 billion more than last year’s budget, this year’s budget made large investments in housing and homelessness, behavioral health, and climate change. The Democrats’ 16-year transportation-spending package also made historic investments in transportation infrastructure including highway projects, road maintenance, ferries, and transit services.

What’s next? Once a bill has finally passed the Legislature, it is sent to the Governor for his action. After the Governor reviews the bill, he may decide to sign it, veto part of it, or veto all of it. If the Governor vetoes part or all of it, the Legislature may vote to override the veto. The Governor has 20 days after the Legislature adjourns to take action.

Not surprisingly, legislators will pivot almost immediately to the campaign trail. This year is a major election year with the entire House and half the Senate appearing on the November ballot. There will be a fair number of open seats, with about a dozen legislators announcing their retirement in the last days of session (and there could be more). These include Senators Brown (8th), Carlyle (36th), Frockt (46th) and Sheldon (35th). In the House, retiring legislators include Representatives Dolan (22nd), Dufault (15th), Johnson (30th), Kirby (29th), Sells (38th), and Sullivan (47th). Representatives Klippert (8th) and Kraft (17th) have announced their plans to run for Congress. Representatives Boehnke (8th), Frame (36th), MacEwen (35th), Shewmake (42nd), and Valdez (46th) will be running for open seats in the Senate.

## WSLHA Priority Bill Recap

[HB 1043](https://app.leg.wa.gov/billsummary?BillNumber=1043&Initiative=false&Year=2021) is the bill establishing Washington as a member of the **Audiology & Speech-Language Pathology Compact (ASLP-IC).** The Compact facilitates the practice of audiology and speech-language pathology by securing a privilege to practice in a member state or through telehealth. It passed the House Health Care & Wellness Committee, but unfortunately did not pass the House.

[HB 1592](https://app.leg.wa.gov/billsummary?BillNumber=1592&Initiative=false&Year=2021)- Concerning **military spouse employment**. This bill requires the Department of Health (DOH) to issue a license to a military spouse within 30 days of a completed application. It passed the House Housing, Human Services & Veterans Committee and the House Appropriations Committee, but did not pass the House.

[HB 1854](https://app.leg.wa.gov/billsummary?BillNumber=1854&Initiative=false&Year=2021) requires health carriers to cover hearing instruments for health plans issued or renewed on or after January 1, 2023. This bill was heard in the House Health Care & Wellness Committee but was not voted out of that committee. It died in the House.

[SB 5753](https://app.leg.wa.gov/billsummary?BillNumber=5753&Initiative=false&Year=2021) makes changes to **boards and commissions** at the Department of Health, including the Board of Hearing & Speech (BOHS). This bill increases the compensation for BOHS members and clarifies its definition of a quorum. This bill has passed the House and Senate and is on its way to the Governor for his action.

[SB 5848](https://app.leg.wa.gov/billsummary?BillNumber=5848&Year=2021&Initiative=false) licenses **music therapists**. Initially, WSLHA testified against this bill. However, during negotiations with the music therapists, we reached agreement on an amendment that reflects the agreement on the national level between ASHA and the American Music Therapy Association (AMTA). This includes language that:

* + Clarifies that music therapists may not evaluate, examine, instruct, or counsel on speech language, communication, and swallowing disorders and conditions.
  + Prohibits licensed music therapists from representing to the public that the individual is authorized to treat a communication disorder and clarifies that it does not prohibit the licensed music therapist from working with clients who have a communication disorder and address communication skills.
  + Requires that before providing music therapy services, music therapists must review the client's diagnosis, treatment needs, and treatment with the health care providers involved in the client's care.
  + Requires before providing music therapy services to a student for an identified educational need, the licensed music therapist must review the student's diagnosis, treatment needs, and treatment plan with the individualized family service plan's team or the individualized education program's team.
  + SB 5848 passed the Senate but died in the House.

## A Word of Thanks

As you know, lobbying is a team effort. I want to thank WSLHA President Bethany Davis and the rest of the WSLHA Board for their expertise, guidance, and assistance this session. I also want to thank the WSLHA members who advocated on the association’s behalf this session. None of this could happen without the dedication of you, our members.