

WSLHA Priorities

[HB 1589](#), our **fair contracting bill**, has been referred to the Senate Health & Long Term Care Committee. We're working with Senator Cleveland, the chair of that committee, to get the bill scheduled for a hearing.

Health Care Bills of Interest

[HB 1686](#), the bill creating a **health care entity registry**, passed the House on a vote of 86-7 and is scheduled for a hearing on Tuesday in the Senate Health & Long Term Care Committee. The bill was amended considerably on the House floor. It's now a study bill, requiring the Department of Health (DOH) to develop a plan and recommendations regarding the creation of a complete and interactive registry.

Bills that did not survive the House of Origin cutoff deadline include:

- [HB 1392](#), the bill that creates the Medicaid Access Program to **increase Medicaid reimbursement rates**
- [SB 5387](#), the **corporate practice of health care** bill

General News

House of Origin cutoff...Wednesday, March 12th, marked the critical deadline for bills to advance out of their chambers of origin. With this milestone passed, legislative focus now shifts to the next phase: bills making their way across the rotunda to be considered by policy and fiscal committees in the opposite chamber.

Each floor cutoff day brings anticipation with one recurring question—what will be the “5 p.m. bill?” According to legislative rules, if the bill’s process begins before the 5 p.m. deadline, discussions can continue well into the evening. This final bill of the day often carries symbolic weight. Sometimes, it's a contentious measure that sparks extended debate, stretching late into the night. Other times, it's a broadly supported, feel-good proposal—perhaps a resolution honoring a local hero, commemorating an historic event, or recognizing a cause that garners bipartisan backing. This year, we witnessed both types of bills.

This cutoff, the House 5pm bill was HB 1296 (Stonier, D-49), a hot-button student rights bill. The legislation proposes modifications to existing policies concerning student rights, parental rights, and employee protections within public schools and requires school districts to adopt or amend policies by January 31, 2026, to incorporate guidelines from the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction

(OSPI). These guidelines aim to eliminate discrimination based on gender expression and identity, address challenges faced by transgender students, and apply anti-bullying policies to these students.

The bill has elicited partisan responses. Republican legislators have expressed concerns that HB 1296 could undermine the "parents' bill of rights" initiative (Initiative 2081) passed in 2024. The bill was brought up shortly before the 5pm deadline and then not debated on until the middle of the night, with debate wrapping up at 2:15am. The bill passed on a party-line vote, with the adoption of 6 of 128 proposed amendments.

And in the Senate, the majority chose SB 5263 (Pedersen, D-43) as their 5pm bill. The bipartisan legislation, which passed 48-0, proposes several significant changes to special education funding to enhance support for students with disabilities. Debate was sometimes emotional, with several members on each side of the aisle speaking.

Budget considerations...All eyes will be on the state's revenue forecast release on Tuesday. Budget writers use this forecast to make final adjustments to their budgets. However, the uncertainty of the federal budget looms large, particularly potential cuts to Medicaid. This may make the March forecast a difficult predictor of the state's economy, with some already thinking that the June revenue forecast will show a more accurate picture of the state's budget challenges.

The Senate Democrats will release their budget on March 24th, with a hearing on March 25th. This budget will include a combination of billions of dollars in cuts, new revenue, and savings. The House is expected to release their budget around the same time, but it's unclear whether their revenue package will be included in their budget or announced later in session.

This week, Senate Republicans proposed an alternative budget aimed at tackling the state's multi-billion-dollar deficit without introducing new taxes. Their plan includes a \$75.6 billion budget for the next two years, marking a 5% increase from the current cycle. Key strategies involve using surplus funds, pausing planned expansions for state-subsidized childcare, and forgoing approximately \$4 billion in previously negotiated pay raises for state workers. Instead of these raises, they propose a one-time \$5,000 bonus for employees. Senator Chris Gildon, the Republican budget lead, emphasized that this approach seeks a middle ground between cuts and tax increases. Democratic budget leaders have criticized the Republican proposal as "unsustainable." The state's projected budget deficit estimates vary, with figures ranging from \$12 billion to over \$18 billion.