Capitol News

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# WSLHA Priorities

[HB 1001](https://app.leg.wa.gov/billsummary?BillNumber=1001&Initiative=false&Year=2023), the Audiologist/Speech-Language Pathologist licensure compact bill, is scheduled for a hearing in the Senate Health & Long Term Care Committee on Thursday. WSLHA will be testifying in support of this bill.

[HB 1222](https://lawfilesext.leg.wa.gov/biennium/2023-24/Pdf/Bills/House%20Bills/1222.pdf?q=20230115205537), legislation that **mandates large group insurance plan coverage** (employers with more than 50 employees) **for hearing instruments and the services necessary to fit them,** passed the House on a strong 89-8 vote. It now heads to the Senate Health & Long Term Care Committee. It was amended by the House to do the following:

* Specifies that the requirement to provide coverage for hearing instruments and associated services applies school employees in addition to other public employees.
* Increases the minimum benefit for hearing instruments to no less than $3,000 per ear with hearing loss. Modifies the hearing instrument benefit for public employees and their dependents by expiring the current requirement to cover a hearing instrument every five years on December 31, 2023, and applying the coverage requirements found in the bill for health carriers to health plans offered to public employees and their dependents beginning January 1, 2024.
* Removes the provision that provides an enrollee may choose a higher priced hearing instrument and pay the difference between the price of the hearing instrument and the benefit amount without financial or contractual penalty to the enrollee or to the in-network provider.

[HB 1508](https://app.leg.wa.gov/billsummary?BillNumber=1508&Chamber=House&Year=2023) is legislation regarding the **Health Care Cost Transparency Board**. This Board was established in 2020 to analyze total health care expenditures in Washington, identify trends in health care cost growth, and establish a health care cost growth benchmark.

HB 1508 allows the Board to require a payer or health care provider to submit a performance improvement plan if it has substantially exceeded the health care cost growth benchmark without reasonable justification or meaningful improvement for two of the previous three years. The bill also authorizes the Board to impose fines on providers who violate data submission requirements or exceed the benchmark without reasonable justification. **Work is being done on an amendment that would exempt small health care practices from the performance improvement plans and fines established in this bill.**

The Legislature is considering several bills dealing with **special education funding**.

* [HB 1436](https://app.leg.wa.gov/billsummary?BillNumber=1436&Initiative=false&Year=2023) is OSPI-request legislation. **It passed the House on a strong 94-2 vote**. It increases special education excess cost multipliers for kindergarten through age 21 (K-21) over four school years to 1.059 for students who spend at least 80 percent of the school day in a general education setting, and 1.043 for those who spend less than 80 percent by the 2026-27 school year. It also increases the enrollment limit for special education funding over several years until the 2027-28 school year, when the limit is removed. It was amended on the floor to clarify the JLARC and SAO performance audit terms.
* [SB 5311](https://app.leg.wa.gov/billsummary?BillNumber=5311&Initiative=false&Year=2023) is Governor-request legislation. It **increases special education cost multipliers** over a 4-year period and increases the funding cap to 15%. **It passed the Senate unanimously**. It was amended on the Senate floor to require the Office of the Education Ombuds to delegate and certify at least one special education ombuds to serve each educational service district region, subject to appropriations.
* [HB 1109](https://app.leg.wa.gov/billsummary?BillNumber=1109&Initiative=false&Year=2023) increases the **reimbursement for initial evaluations and IEPs** during the summers of 2023, 2023, and 2025. It was voted out of the Appropriations Committee with the following amendments: the first clarifies that the $3000 for initial evaluations and IEP development are provided per student; the second puts a ‘null and void clause’ on the bill, making it null and void unless funded in the final operating budget. **It passed the House on a vote of 95-1.**
* [HB 1305](https://app.leg.wa.gov/billsummary?BillNumber=1305&Initiative=false&Year=2023) makes several timeline changes to **requirements related to initial student evaluations for special education and to development and implementation of individualized education programs.** **It passed the House on a 95-1 vote.** There were no amendments.

[HB 1565](https://app.leg.wa.gov/billsummary?BillNumber=1565&Year=2023&Initiative=false) addresses professional education workforce recruitment and retention, including the **Beginning Educator Support Team (BEST)** program. **This bill passed the House on a 59-37 vote.** It was amended to direct OSPI to contract with a research entity to conduct a feasibility study for the development and implementation of an online platform for the recruitment and hiring of public school employees that meets specified requirements; and requires a report on the feasibility study to be submitted to the Legislature by October 1, 2024.

[HB 1479](https://app.leg.wa.gov/billsummary?BillNumber=1479&Year=2023&Initiative=false) related to restraint and isolation of students has been pulled from the Rules Committee and is eligible for a vote by the House.

# General News

The Legislature has now passed the half-way point of the 105-day session and are in full-time floor action mode. Some bills will die during this floor period because they are not one of the majority party’s priorities or they lack enough yes votes. Other bills will die because they get laden with time-consuming amendments. Still others will become the victims of too little time and too many bills moving through the process.

Bills have until Wednesday, March 8th to pass the floor in the house of origin. If a bill does not pass by this deadline, it is likely dead for the session. But there’s always the option of amending a dead bill (or sections of it) to another bill that is alive, or crafting a budget proviso that includes that policy.

Committee meetings resume on Thursday to hear bills from the opposite house. Policy committees have only three weeks, until March 29th, to pass these bills.

In economic news, the Washington State Economic and Revenue Forecast Council met on Friday. Revenue collections since the November forecast are up by $89 million (1.1%). However, the report warns of a possible recession in the next year as inflation remains high. The next monthly revenue collection report will be released on March 14th, with the revenue forecast presented on March 20th. The forecast is the last piece of information that budget writers need as they put the final touches on the state budgets. The budgets should be released soon after March 20th.

In health news, the Department of Health announced Friday that effective April 3rd, masks will no longer be required in healthcare, long-term care, and adult correctional facilities. The end of Washington’s universal masking requirements aligns with a similar announcement made Friday by the state of Oregon. DOH continues to recommend masks for patients, healthcare providers, and visitors in healthcare settings.