Capitol News

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# Last Week’s Highlights

With less than one month of the legislative session remaining, Friday, March 26th was the last day for bills to be passed out of policy committees in the opposite chamber. The next deadline comes quickly, with a Friday, April 2nd cutoff for bills to pass fiscal committees in the opposite chamber.

**Budgets released.** Last week was all about the budget. Senate Democrats released their 2021-2023 operating budget on Thursday, with a public hearing held on Friday. With state tax collections rebounding to roughly what they were before the pandemic, the Senate operating budget spends $59.2 billion over the next two years, on top of $7 billion in funds from the federal government. The budget also uses $1.8 billion from the Rainy Day Fund and assumes $357 million from the capital gains tax proposal.

House Democrats released their 2021-2023 operating budget on Friday, with a public hearing on Saturday. The $58 billion proposal also uses approximately $1.8 billion from the Rainy Day Fund and $357 million from the capital gains tax proposal.

You’ll recall that HB 1047, the bill mandating insurance coverage for **children’s hearing aids**, died in the House. However, **WSLHA, along with other proponents of the bill, successfully worked to get a proviso in the House budget that funds an actuarial study of this mandate.** This means that we will have the necessary cost information to pursue HB 1047 next session.

Here are the highlights from the budgets, focusing generally on health care:

*Senate:*

* $1 billion for vaccination and other pandemic response.
* $150 million for foundational public health services.
* $89 million in combined state and federal funding for special education.
* $28 million for diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives in higher education.
* $3.6 million to complete the expansion of the WSU Medical school.
* $42 million to support the University of Washington hospital system.

*House*:

* $1.185 billion for vaccination and other pandemic response.
* $100 million for foundational public health services.
* $53 million for additional special education funding.
* $94 million for primary care provider rate increases.
* $11 million for school nurses.
* $2.3 million for the UW Medical School and $5.9 million for the WSU Medical School.

# Priority Bill Updates

* **HB 1196**, the bill that creates reimbursement parity for **audio-only consultations**, passed the Senate Health & Long Term Care Committee on Friday.  It was amended in committee to direct the Telemedicine Collaborative to study the need for an established relationship before providing audio-only telemedicine and report to the Legislature by December 1, 2021; and to clarify that Medicaid patients will not be billed for audio-only telemedicine visits. It will next be heard in the Senate Ways & Means Committee on Wednesday.
* **SB 5169,** the bill providing **reimbursement** to health care providers for the cost of **PPE** when treating patients in person, is now in the Rules Committee.
* **SB 5229,** the legislation that creates a **health equity continuing education** requirement for health care providers, **passed the House** last Wednesday. It was amended to move the date upon which information must be provided to licensees about available CE courses from July 1, 2022, to July 1, 2023. It now must return to the Senate for a vote to concur in the House amendment.
* **SB 5284** passed the House Labor & Workplace Standards Committee last Friday. This bill **eliminates subminimum wage** certificates for people with disabilities after July 31, 2023. It is now on the Senate second reading calendar.

# This Week’s Events

This week, the fiscal committees will hear bills as they wrap up committee action in advance of the Friday, April 2nd cutoff. Both operating budgets are scheduled to be voted out of committee on Monday. It’s expected that both chambers will pass their budgets by the weekend. After that, negotiations between the House and Senate will begin in earnest to reconcile the differences between the two budgets.

While budget negotiations are happening behind the scenes, it’s back to full-time floor action for the House and Senate to meet the opposite house cutoff on April 11th. The Legislature is scheduled to adjourn on April 25th.