Capitol News

February 6, 2021

Melissa Johnson, WSLHA Lobbyist

# Priority Bill Updates

With only one more week for policy committees to hold hearings, time is running out for many bills, including our priority bills, **HB 1043 (A-SLP Compact)** and **HB 1047 (mandating insurance coverage for children’s hearing aids**). With legislators prioritizing COVID-related legislation in the health care committees, HB 1043 and HB 1047 are not rising to a high enough priority among legislators. However, they will remain eligible for consideration next session.

# Last Week’s Highlights

Last week, the Senate Ways & Means Committee both heard and voted on **HB 1368, the “early action” bill** providing economic relief in response to the pandemic. The funding is a combination of federal stimulus moneys received at the end of 2020 and state funding. This bill includes funding to extend the increased FMAP rate through June 30, 2021. The Senate is expected to vote on this bill on Wednesday.

**SB 5061, the unemployment legislation**, has been delivered to Governor Inslee for his signature into law. This bill cuts taxes for businesses who are seeing a huge increase in their premiums due in April. The bill contains an emergency clause so that it takes effect upon the Governor’s signature.

HB 1406, the **“wealth tax”** bill was heard in the House Finance Committee last Tuesday. It’s companion, SB 5426, was introduced in the Senate. No hearing is scheduled yet for the Senate bill.

Another revenue bill, **HB 1496**, was introduced in the House last week. This bill imposes a 1% **capital gains** tax on financial tangible assets, with the first $1 billion exempt.  If enacted, it is expected to generate $2.25 billion in 2023 and $2.5 billion in 2024. Half of the receipts from this tax would go to early learning, and half would go to the state’s general fund. It’s being heard on Thursday.

On Wednesday, the House Health Care & Wellness Committee passed **HB 1196**, the bill that creates reimbursement parity for **audio-only consultations**. It was amended in committee to delay the implementation of this reimbursement until January 1, 2023. The bill was also amended to require the Office of the Insurance Commissioner (OIC) to do a study on audio-only consultations, in collaboration with the Health Care Authority and the Telehealth Collaborative. It will now go to the House Appropriations Committee. Its companion bill, **SB 5325**, was heard last Friday in the Senate Health & Long Term Care Committee.

**SB 5169,** the bill providing reimbursement to health care providers for the cost of **PPE** when treating patients in person, is now eligible for a vote by the Senate. **SB 5302,** the bill establishing a **database of vendors** of state-approved PPE equipment, is now in the Senate Ways & Means Committee.

On Friday, the Senate Health & Long Term Care Committee passed **SB 5229**. This is the legislation that creates a **health equity continuing education** requirement for health care providers. It was amended to require the Department of Health (DOH) to adopt rules establishing the minimum standards for continuing education programs by January 1, 2023; and to require one course to be free of charge to licensees.

# This Week’s Events

We are entering the fifth week of the legislative session, and the last week for bills to be heard in House of Origin policy committees. The policy committee cutoff is February 15th. Bills with a fiscal impact to the state’s budget must clear the fiscal committees by February 22nd. While some committees are still holding public hearings on bills, most committees this week will devote their time to voting on bills to meet the policy committee cutoff deadline.

On Monday, the Senate Health & Long Term Care Committee will hear SB 5399, a bill establishing the **Universal Health Care Commission**. The Commission’s charge is to develop a plan to be implemented by 2026, that provides comprehensive, equitable, and affordable health care coverage under a publicly financed and privately and publicly delivered health care system to all state residents.

# Virtual Town Hall Meetings

With the Legislature meeting remotely, this year’s Legislator Town Hall meetings will also be held remotely. So far, only the [House Democrats have released their list of Town Hall meetings](https://housedemocrats.wa.gov/blog/2021/01/31/2021-virtual-and-telephone-town-halls/). Many of these are coming up quickly – and they are listed by date rather than district. **This is an excellent opportunity to advocate for our priority bills with your lawmakers.**