

2024 LEGISLATIVE OBJECTIVES

City of Bellingham - Port of Bellingham - Whatcom County

The joint legislative agenda outlines and defines the shared objectives of the three entities and the commitment to work cooperatively with the Legislature, to strengthen the partnership between state and local governments, and to ensure that we have the full resources to implement the policies and goals as adopted by the State of Washington.

Budget Requests

We support funding for community-based projects in line with our shared policy priorities. In addition, we urge the legislature to fund the capital budget requests submitted individually by the Port of Bellingham, City of Bellingham, and Whatcom County, including:

- MTCA funding for environmental cleanup and brownfield redevelopment (Capital, Port and City of Bellingham)
- Commercial pump-out to protect Puget Sound (Capital, Port)
- What-COMM Dispatch Facility (Capital, City of Bellingham)
- 23 Hour Crisis Relief Center Gap Funding (Capital, Whatcom County)

Policy Position Statements

Opioid Response and Behavioral Health: Families and communities across Washington are devastated by the twin crisis of substance use and mental illness. This affects all levels of society – from individuals to institutions - and local governments do not have the resources to provide the continuum of services needed. The State must expand its efforts across the board, including:

- Fully fund state-mandated crisis services, including competency evaluations; expand post-crisis follow-up services; and, fully fund PACT teams.
- Ensure adequate Medicaid reimbursements rates, including at newly developed 23-hour crisis relief centers. Direct the HCA to establish a minimum fee schedule that incorporates the results of the comparison rate study, broaden the comparison rate study, and increase rates for people with significant or emergency BH needs.
- Investment in the planning, construction, and O&M of regional behavioral health facilities.
- Fund alternative response programs (LEAD) and prosecutorial diversion programs for Trueblood Class Members.
- Obligate MCOs to authorize longer periods of withdrawal management and SUD inpatient treatment.
- Improve access to mobile and office-based treatment through community-based agencies.
- Bolster the behavioral health workforce, including reducing educational debt, expanding state-funded student loan support through the Washington Health Corps', and eliminate the DOH credentialing backlog
- Fund local drug task forces

Broadband and Digital Equity: High-speed internet service, affordable equipment and access to digital skills, is critical for economic development, education, employment, civic engagement, access to services, and ensuring equity between rural and urban areas. Continued federal and state investments are necessary to fund this vital infrastructure, and those investments should allow local discretion regarding technology methods and geographic priorities. Local government can be a partner in bridging the digital divide but it is not appropriate to rely on local governments as the sole funder of this utility. We support the Washington State Broadband Office's request for \$100 million in funding for this vital infrastructure.

Housing Affordability and Eviction Prevention: The scale of the housing affordability crisis and the number of families at severe risk for homelessness is at crisis levels. Affordable housing is essential towards maintaining a vibrant and sustainable regional economy, and the Legislature must make additional capital, operating, services, and eviction prevention funding available through state programs and new local options. The legislature should also explore available options for stemming the inflow of families into homelessness due to severe cost-burden. The legislature should also make available state resources to support local needs for winter shelter services, severe weather shelters, safe parking sites and other temporary services to serve our growing unsheltered populations.

Climate: The State should utilize multiple pathways for distributing Climate Commitment Act Funding, including:

- Local government formula allocations. Current funds available to local governments are competitive grant applications, which adds administrative burden, limits predictability, and jeopardizes smaller governments' ability to implement projects if they lack staff capacity to submit applications. Non-competitive grant allocations promote cross-jurisdictional collaboration, long-range planning, and a more impactful investment of funding beyond an individual project.
- Continue grant programs for climate resiliency and climate impact mitigation, vehicle electrification and multimodal projects, ferry vessel and terminal electrification, clean building upgrades and solar, weatherization, urban forestry, and other investments for local governments and individual households to make the clean energy transition.

Additionally, we urge the legislature to continue support for energy efficiency and clean energy transition and development, including the Solar Energy Resiliency Act and Fair Access to Community Solar.

Childcare: As communities struggle with workforce retention and recruitment post-pandemic, the importance of a stable childcare sector is paramount. State investments into childcare facilities, workforce development and stabilization, family subsidies, and augmenting the full cost of quality care are necessary to stabilize this industry and provide critical early education to children across Washington.

Fiscal Sustainability: Local governments have limited abilities to raise revenue and continue to face immense pressure to meet growing community needs. We urge the state to protect and enhance local revenue sharing options, preserve shared tax revenue for local governments, and grant flexibility for local governments to utilize investment funds for critical community capital projects.

