

Lobbyist Report

November 2020

List of Meetings or Workgroups I attended

Internet Access Crisis Team (chaired by Rep. Mia Gregerson)
O2G Workgroup(through DOH regarding licensing fees/increases)
WHMCA Board Meeting



Legislator Meetings:

I had the following meetings with legislators to discuss a variety of issues and I brought up WHMCA and let them know that we can be a BH resource for them:

Rep-Elect Jamilla Taylor
Rep-Elect Jeff Wilson
Rep-Elect David Hackney
Sen Schoesler (Senate Minority leader)

Legislative Summary for Mental Health Specifically

The election in Washington state ended being fairly anti-climatic and predictable, with the exclusion of 2 very moderate Democrats being voted out (Rep. Brian Blake, Sen. Dean Takko) and one undergoing a re-count in a tight race (Sen. Mark Mullet.) But overall, the newly elected officials will be good for WHMCA. We also now have more people of color in the Senate and House which is just generally good for our state as a whole.

Discussions are mainly swirling around COVID: racial disparities in health care, access to care, COVID related mental health issues, etc. I foresee an uptick in need continuing as well work well in to the Spring.

Legislators have been talking about expanding internet/broadband for years now, but have never wanted to foot the bill. With COVID forcing people to work and learn from home, they are realizing how dire the need is for expansion. Not only to rural areas, but to intercity locations that also don't have access. I started attending the Internet Access Crisis team meetings and was surprised to be the only person representing a health care profession on the call. I feel that legislators will be more likely to vote for funds to go towards an expansion, but things move at a snails pace in Olympia so I can't predict when and how they will proceed on this issue.

During the O2G meeting, there was discussion about raising licensing fees and I voiced opposition to another fee, stating the need for more BHC's in WA and that another monetary burden (although it might be small) would not be something the profession supports.

Meetings I requested

"Committee Days" just ended on December 2nd and I'm working on setting up meeting with legislators that have been assigned to committees that we work with. If you would like to participate in these meetings before session begins, please contact me - legislators truly appreciate speaking to their constituents and profession experts (you!)

General Legislative News

Post-election, the Democrats still hold the majority in the House, Senate and Governor's office. The upcoming session is going to revolve around major issues such as COVID response, education funding, internet access, police reform and the budget. Legislators have been asked to limit their amount of bills and they have received a "guide" per-se to what bills will have priority. That being said, small policy bills are not likely to move this year. The big picture bills will be the main goal.

Committee days proved that the legislature is not ready from a technical perspective, to successfully run a virtual session. There were tons of audio-visual and scheduling errors throughout the week. I'm working closely with TVW (the state's legislative channel) and Legislative services as a liaison between lobbyists and these outlets. I'm certain they will iron out the wrinkles over the next month and I have a first row seat to watch what unfolds.

Currently, no one without a State worker badge will be allowed on campus. Most members will not be allowed on campus unless for those in extreme circumstances (rural legislators mostly). Lobbyists and the public are not allowed to go on campus what so ever.

2021 is going to be an interesting year, but I've worked diligently on staying in the forefront of all discussions so I can provide the best service possible to WHMCA.

What's on the Horizon?

A coalition meeting is being scheduled amongst the lobbyists for various behavior health professions and groups. This will be a very telling meeting where we can see what the group's goals are as a whole.

Sara Stewart

Melanie Stewart and Associates

HPC Advocacy

Cascade Government Affairs

360-229-8168