

Lobbyist Report



April 2023

Meetings

April 4 - Behavioral Health Coalition

April 11 - Behavioral Health Coalition

April 18 - Behavioral Health Coalition

Misc. phone calls and in person unscheduled meetings with Rep. Slatter, Ybarra, Orwall, Bateman and others.

Legislative Summary for Mental Health Specifically

The 2023 legislative session ran several bills that addressed the behavioral health crisis and the healthcare workforce shortage. WMHCA assisted in addressing the problem by passing the Mental Health Counseling Compact. This is the first bill that WMHCA has taken the lead, and to pass it in our first year of trying was a phenomenal success! While the result was not perfect, we will participate in the rule-making process to ensure the bill is implemented correctly and accurately. There has been some discussion on whether all current licensees will be included in the compact, even if their original program did not meet national standards. We understand that all license holders will be eligible and no "legacy clause" is needed, but if that proves not to be the case, we will address the concern and ensure that it is corrected.

Other bills that passed include:

HB 1724: Behavioral Health Workforce

While we supported the original version of this bill as it left the house, the Senate amended the language, adding a section that will allow those working in community behavioral health for more than five years to take additional course work to assess and diagnose during intake. WMHCA, in partnership with NASW and the LMFTs, fought tooth and nail to remove this section for obvious reasons, including general public safety and the effect it will take on already low-paying wages at CBH. Legislators believe that the "bottleneck" at CBH is during the intake process, and by granting these privileges, more people will be able to access care. The quality of care did not appear important to them, and our arguments were lost on deaf ears. We were told by Representative Slatter (chair of the workforce committee) that she would be keeping a close eye on the process, and she encouraged us to engage during rule-making to ensure the coursework requirements are up to par. WMHCA will be actively participating in the process.

SB 5555: Certified Peer Specialists

WMHCA strongly opposed this bill and helped peer groups in opposition navigate the legislative process. A large peer group (run by a House Representative) has run this bill for the past few years. While we have successfully blocked it, this year, it was added to the cluster of groups "addressing the workforce shortage" and was deemed necessary by the legislature.

2SSB 5120: Crisis Relief Centers

This bill was modeled after a program in Arizona and has been delivered to the Governor's desk awaiting

signature. The idea is to establish 23-hour centers where people in crisis can go as the first step in getting appropriate help or treatment vs. going to the emergency room. With a high fiscal note and discrepancies on how the centers will be run, it will likely take a few years to get this program up and running, but it is an excellent first step to help those in the most desperate need.

Please view our full bill report (attached) for more details - if you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact sara@sarastewartinc.com.

Meetings Requested:

None at this time.

General Legislative News:

Briefing

The 105-day Washington state legislative session adjourned sine die late in the evening on April 23, 2023, completing its constitutionally mandated timeframe for an odd-year session.

The 2023 legislative session was the first to convene in an all-in-person since the beginning of pandemic lockdowns and restrictions shortly after the adjournment of the 2020 legislative session. Conducting business in person again was well-received by many, with the state Lt. Governor noting how important it is to govern in person rather than over Zoom.

State legislative Democrats were essentially energized after their 2022 election wins, where they ended up not losing any Senate seats (29 Democrats – 20 Republicans) and gaining one House seat (58 Democrats – 40 Republicans). These numbers gave Democratic leadership in both chambers significant power to advance and pass legislation, such as cornerstone Democratic priorities around affordable housing, firearms regulation, health care privacy, police reform, etc.

Though, it must be noted that inter-caucus splits became more prevalent with the higher majorities. Depending on the issue, disagreements were drawn between Progressive, Liberal, and Moderates; Seattle/King County and greater Puget Sound; and activist-rooted vs. the old guard.

Overall, 23 percent of the bills introduced this session were passed by the House and the Senate (485) and sent to the Governor for signature.

The Legislature passed a \$69.8 billion state operating budget, a \$13.4 billion state transportation budget, and an \$8.6 billion state capital budget – for a total of \$91.8 billion for the biennium, putting Washington state amongst the most significant state budgets in the country.

Quick facts – 2023 session:

• 2122 measures were introduced in the House and Senate since the pre-file period opened on December 4, 2022. • 876 bills or resolutions were introduced in the House of Representatives. • 768 bills or resolutions were introduced in the Senate.

- **270 House Bills or resolutions** advanced from the House of Representatives.
- **214 Senate bills or resolutions** advanced from the Senate.

Nearly all bills that passed their chamber of origin passed out of the state legislature entirely.

Political Lay of the Land

A major announcement from the House Republican caucus came on sine die; House Republican leader J.T. Wilcox (District 2 – Yelm, R) announced that he would be stepping down after the adjournment of the legislature. Representative Drew Stokesbary (District 31 – Auburn, R) was voted in as the House Republican leader.

A potential announcement from incumbent Democratic Gov. Jay Inslee of if he will run for an unprecedented fourth term for Governor is being watched out for by the legislative community. It is yet to be confirmed if he will and if any Democrats may attempt to run against him during the primary elections regardless.

Senate budget chair, Senator Christine Rolfes (District 23 – Bainbridge Island, D), threw her hat in as a candidate for appointment to a vacant Kitsap County commission position. She said that she would not run for her Senate seat if she were to be appointed to the county commission seat.

Looking forward – potential Special Session

In this 2023 legislative session, the legislature took to task to finalize a permanent “fix” to the Washington Supreme Court’s *Blake* in early 2022. This decision essentially ruled that solely possessing illicit narcotics were not criminal in and of itself and struck down the constitutionality of the state’s existing felony charge for drug possession.

On April 23, Sine Die, and in a historic fashion, the House of Representatives voted down the supposed compromise legislation between House and Senate Democrats 43 Yeas -55 Nays.

With this passage failure and approaching a July 1 deadline before the temporary measure to address the *Blake* court decision lapses, state Democratic leadership and the Governor will negotiate on a renewed compromise and potentially call for a Special Session to pass a permanent fix to the *Blake* court decision.

What is on the horizon?

If a special session is called, all bills currently “dead” will return “alive.” This means that we will need to pay close attention to all legislative happenings to ensure that legislators do not utilize the special session to continue working on bills we oppose. Conversely, if there are bills we would like to see move, we can work on those if legislators choose to address them. Bills with a fiscal note will unlikely be addressed.

Moving forward, we will be working on addressing the ability of associates to take insurance, cost of living reimbursement increases, and we will be active in rule-making this summer.

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