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Democrats unveil \$2.2 billion relief package

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Friday afternoon, Democratic state legislators announced a \$2.2 billion package for COVID-relief, including \$688 million for K-12 public schools. Lawmakers use the majority of the second round of federal funding (\$1.8 billion) to plug holes in the economy and respond to renters, small businesses, school districts, childcare providers, and others who have been negatively impacted by the pandemic over the past 10 months. An accompanying bill, [HB 1367](#), would modify funding sources for certain Medicaid-eligible COVID-19 related expenses incurred in calendar year 2020, adding \$400 million to the total proposed expenditure.

[HB 1368](#) (companion SB 5344) has been scheduled for Tuesday, January 26 at 3:30 PM. The bill is scheduled for a vote out of committee on Thursday, January 28, and expected to be up for floor debate soon. According to bill sponsor and House Appropriations Chair Timm Ormsby, D-Spokane, the goal is to get the relief bill to the Senate quickly, where Senate Democrats say they will pick up the bill, review, and hope to get to the governor's desk within the next few weeks.

Unlike the governor's proposed 2020 2nd supplemental budget, the bill does not tap into the state's "rainy-day" fund (Budget Stabilization Account). When the governor's budget was being developed, it wasn't clear if Congress would be sending a second stimulus package the state's way. Lawmakers say that if they can act to get these funds out the door quickly, there might even be a third federal stimulus package to help balance the 2021-23 operating deficit and continue to provide relief until the economy reopens fully.

House Republican Drew Stokesbary, R-Auburn, has proposed a more robust relief package. [HB 1334](#) would appropriate \$1.8 billion in new federal stimulus funds and spend \$2.1 billion from the state's rainy-day fund and other untapped federal sources, according to his [web page announcing the bill](#). One difference from the Democrats' proposal is funding to support the Working Families Tax Credit this year, a Governor priority.

Of the \$688.1 million for K-12 public schools, OSPI would be required to allocate the entire amount as subgrants to local school districts with two "strings":

- By March 1, 2021, public school districts, tribal compact schools, and charter schools would be required to review and update school reopening plans adopted for the current school year, and to submit updated plans to OSPI.
- By June 1, 2021, school districts, tribal compact schools and charter schools would be required to submit an academic and student well-being recovery plan to OSPI. The plan would be designed to address learning loss among students, with specific focus on

student groups identified in the state improvement framework and students experiencing homelessness and students in foster care.

In a separate section of the bill related to the new COVID-19 Public Health Response Account, funding for the “safe reopening of schools” for vaccination expenditures is prioritized, as well as expenditures to help schools with testing and contact tracing. The bill also would put \$365 million in rental assistance and housing; \$240 million in small business grants; \$50 million in assistance to public and private childcare facilities; and \$26.3 million for food insecurity.

Early action initiatives

- SB 5128 is designed as a fix to pandemic’s effect on school bus ridership. The bill had a public hearing in the 1st week and passed out of the Senate education committee in an amended form. [SSB 5128](#) has been scheduled for public hearing in the Senate Ways & Means Committee on January 28 at 4 PM. With the emphasis on the new ESSER funds, there is some doubt about whether lawmakers will pursue this bill now or wait. While the ESSER funds are three times that of the first round, they do not backfill transportation or enrollment apportionment declines or the additional costs associated with reopening schools safely. We’ll see if they hold the hearing as planned or pull the bill from consideration for the time being.
- [HB 1121](#) would give the State Board of Education the authority to offer high school credit waivers in times of emergencies – both from a statewide level or in regions or more localized catastrophic events. The bill passed the House Education committee on a party-line vote with no amendments.

Remote but real

Committee chairs, vice chairs and members seemed to hit their groove this week with virtual committee hearings, moving through testimony much more smoothly than Week 1. In addition to holding work sessions on a range of topics, committee members heard from more than just “the usual suspects.” While it still isn’t quite clear what order a chair might be taking the various Pro, Con and Other speakers, many more people are signing in to testify “live” who are unaffiliated with any group or organization.

In addition to the COVID-19 relief bills up for public hearing this week, SB 5078 (regarding high-capacity magazines) has already drawn a list of more than 100 people wishing to testify “live” and at least three times that stating their position (about 90% Con). While not a record-breaker (that belongs to a Senate Republican business recovery bill last week), the remote status of the legislature is contributing to more people participating through the various alternatives provided through online portals.

WSPTA Legislative Priorities (all bills may be accessed [here](#))

Washington State PTA adopts a [two-year platform](#). Delegates at the 2020 Legislative Assembly adopted five issues as the highest priority issues, and three as “Also Supported.” [Videos](#) and

handouts for members' use in advocacy efforts this session are posted on the WSPTA Advocacy [page](#) under each position statement.

This past week, Washington State PTA only testified on one bill:

- Michelle Nims, former WSPTA president, [testified in support](#) of HB 1162, another State Board of Education bill that would allow students to graduate with 20 credits as long as the 17 core credits were completed and other graduation requirements met, and would add a portfolio option as a graduation pathway. The 40-minute hearing on this bill can be found [here](#).

Members also participated in the Focus on Advocacy last week, sending more than 350 emails to legislators in support of the WSPTA platform. Missed it? There's always time to send your own email to a legislator. Here are links to the five topics January 18-22: [Focus on Safety](#). [Focus on Preserving Funding](#). [Focus on Equity](#). [Focus on Mental Health](#). [Focus on Anti-Racism](#).

The Week Ahead

(Schedule subject to change, all bills can be founded through this [link](#))

Please use the WSPTA bill tracker which includes the list of all of the public hearings and executive sessions for the week of January 25. There are a lot of hearings, and WSPTA will be busy testifying every day of the week!