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Legislature likely to act this week on \$2.2 billion relief package

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Last week's report covered the unveiling of the Democrats' COVID-relief package, which is broken into several large "buckets," including \$688 million for K-12 public schools. [HB 1368](#) had a public hearing on January 26 and passed out of committee two days later by a bipartisan vote of 25 to 7. The bill has been scheduled for floor action Monday, February 1, starting at 5:30 PM. It is expected to pass and be heard in the Senate Ways & Means Committee the next day (a committee vote is scheduled for February 4, and the bill is expected to be debated by the full Senate on Friday, February 5). The rush to move the bill quickly is designed to get federal funds out to support public schools, local and state health departments, renter assistance, and economic recovery through small business grants.

Two full weeks are left before the first major cutoff, so committees are continuing a steady stream of public hearings and regular votes out of committee. February 15 is the last day for bills to be considered in policy committees. Since the 15th is Monday, any committee that doesn't meet that day must wrap up work by February 12.

Early action initiatives

- SB 5128 was heard by the Senate Ways & Means Committee on January 28. Committee members heard a mix of "Pro" and "Other" on the bill, with all expressing thanks that lawmakers have recognized the transportation funding formula is broken, particularly during a pandemic. One challenge raised was that nearly all districts have been "bringing school to the students," and many smaller districts have offered in-person learning since the start of the school year. Requests were made that any solution ensure districts can seek the maximum level of transportation funding to preserve school-year funding and that solutions recognize the need to fix next school year too.
- [HB 1121](#) would give the State Board of Education (SBE) 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 on January 27 by a vote of 85-11 with two amendments. One change was a requirement that the SBE report detailed data to the Legislature by December 15, 2021, regarding waivers applying to students in the classes of 2020 and 2021. EHB 1121 has been scheduled for a public hearing with the Senate Early Learning & K-12 Committee on Friday, February 5, at 8 AM.
- Lawmakers continue to be aware of school district shortfalls due to enrollment decline. A draft bill has been circulating but has not been introduced yet.

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 members were very busy testifying in a variety of committees:

- [SB 5078](#) would enact limits to high-capacity magazines to reduce gun violence. [Hear](#) Gwen Loosmore, a Mercer Island parent, represent WSPTA in the Senate Law & Justice Committee. Modeling WSPTA best practices to leave them with a few key words, Dr. Loosmore ended with, “The whole point of high-capacity magazines is to allow the gun to keep shooting. Well, we want the shooting to stop.”
- Washington State PTA members adopted a position last fall to close the digital divide. Members Nancy Chamberlain and Tori Emerson testified in the House Community & Economic Development Committee on January 27 in favor of [HB 1336](#), a bill that would expand broadband access across the state by extending retail sales authority to public entities like cities and PUDs. Listen [here](#).
- On January 28, WSPTA member Heidi Bennett testified on SB 5128, the transportation funding fix, in the Senate Ways & Means Committee. Bennett thanked lawmakers but encouraged them to keep districts as whole as possible because districts incurred costs bringing school to students when students couldn’t come to them or, for districts that have been in person since the fall, ridership has dropped significantly. Listen [here](#).
- After serving on a workgroup regarding a youth tip line reporting system, WSPTA member Tanya Aggar was poised to deliver strong testimony in support of [SB 5327](#) on January 29. Listen [here](#). Aggar also testified the same day on [SB 5209](#), which would develop a 988# line (like 911) for mental health. She requested the committee amend the bill’s reference to a “vision for a youth tip line” since the work has been done and can be a reality this session. Her testimony is [here](#).
- [HB 1214](#) would make changes to laws adopted in the 2019 legislative session regarding training for school resource officers and data collection. Nancy Chamberlain represents WSPTA on the statewide school safety workgroup. On January 29, she spoke in favor of the bill in the House Education Committee while asking for an amendment to require a policy on training requirements so that parents know what to expect if their district employs SROs or contracted security staff. Listen [here](#).
- Speaking in the same House Education meeting, WSPTA member Heidi Bennett testified Pro on [HB 1208](#), a bill to increase flexibility for Learning Assistance Program funding. Bennett requested two amendments to provide guidance to districts and clarify parent expectations, specifically because statutes that allow for the use of LAP to be used for dyslexia screening and other best practices would be repealed. Hear Heidi’s testimony [here](#).

In addition to testifying, Washington State PTA recorded its position on several bills and submitted written testimony when members who were waiting in the wings and didn't get called to testify "live." The latter included members Heidi Zamora and Laura Peterson, who were signed in to testify Pro on HB 1225, school-based health centers, and Tanya Aggar on HB 1182 (companion bill to SB 5209, see above).

The Week Ahead

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

As mentioned above, Week 4 of the 15-week session will be full of lots of committee action. Please use the WSPTA bill tracker, which includes the list of all the public hearings and executive sessions for the week of February 1-5. WSPTA is scheduled to testify nearly every day next week, so watch for more information about Advocacy in Action in the WSPTA blog. If you are interested in testifying for WSPTA, please reach out to Sherry Rudolph, Advocacy Director, at PTAadvocacydir@wastatepta.org.

In addition, WSPTA is doing more than just testifying on bills. That is important work. But we are actively pursuing amendment changes, when needed, to help policies reflect positions and resolutions adopted by the membership this past October and in previous legislative and delegate assemblies. Bills are reviewed carefully, often by teams of members from the WSPTA Advocacy Committee, to provide input to the Advocacy Director and Legislative Consultant before acting.