Washington State PTA Opposes Initiative 645

Washington State PTA Board Position Statement — Final

Washington State PTA, founded in 1905, is the oldest and largest volunteer child advocacy association in the state. Our more than 80,000 members share a bold vision for the future in which every child’s potential becomes a reality.

Initiative 645 will appear on this November's ballot with the title "Initiative Measure No. 645 concerns state and local taxes" (6). It would repeal the Millionaire's Tax passed by the Legislature in 2026 (7) and prohibit any tax on, or measured by, individual income, at the state level and in every county, city, and local jurisdiction in Washington (5). The state's fiscal impact statement estimates the repeal would reduce state revenue by $11.4 billion across state fiscal years 2027 through 2031, cutting the general fund support that pays for core government services, particularly public K-12 education, higher education, and human services (8).

Lawmakers begin writing the 2027–29 state budget in January 2027, weeks after this vote. The Department of Revenue estimates the Millionaire's Tax would generate roughly $3.1 billion for that budget and roughly $8.3 billion for the 2029–31 budget that follows. If Initiative 645 passes, legislators write both budgets without either. Legislators are already bracing for cuts. The Office of Financial Management has warned agencies to expect significant shortfalls and called it likely the most challenging budget any of them has yet faced (9).

WSPTA has never claimed the Millionaire’s Tax was written the way we wanted. In February we told our members we could not support the bill, because its commitment to K-12 education appeared in the intent section and not in the text that governs where the money goes. We asked legislators to write it in. They didn’t, and we’ll ask again in 2027 (4). What Initiative 645 puts to voters is a different question.

Washington State PTA opposes Initiative 645 and urges our members to vote NO.

Why WSPTA Opposes Initiative 645

Critical supports for children and families would likely be cut.

Washington's constitution makes ample funding of basic education the state's paramount duty, and the McCleary decision enforced that obligation. Basic education carries a legal protection that other services for children do not. But basic education is narrowly defined in state law, and that protection does not extend to most of the other ways Washington supports children. Childcare, early learning, food assistance, health coverage, and family stability programs all sit in the part of the budget legislators can reach when they need to balance it.

Part of that loss is already specific. Five percent of the tax's revenue is dedicated to the Fair Start for Kids account, which pays for childcare and early learning. Repeal ends that transfer, a loss of $377 million in the 2029–31 biennium (8).

Resolution 18.46 directs us to pursue school funding without negatively impacting other programs that support children, youth, families, and community well-being (1). Our legislative principles commit us to oppose budget policies, deficit reduction efforts, and other proposals that reduce funding for child-related programs (2). Taking $11.4 billion out of a budget already headed for reductions makes exactly those outcomes more likely.

It bans the tools, not just this tax.

Initiative 645 repeals the Millionaire's Tax. Then it goes further. It puts a very broad definition of income into state law — money a person gains from work, from property, from any other source — and bans any tax on it. That ban isn't limited to Olympia. It reaches every county, city, and local government in Washington. The initiative also asks that its own language be read as broadly as possible (5).

What that will mean for taxes already on the books is not something WSPTA is in a position to predict, and we won't tell voters otherwise. What we can tell them is that the measure asks courts to read it as broadly as possible, and that its full effect on state and local revenue will be settled in litigation after the election rather than before it. For a state facing the budget it is facing, that is a substantial risk to take on.

What concerns us most is how hard this would be to undo. Our members have asked us to seek revenue that is predictable, progressive, and sustainable (1). Initiative 645 would remove one source of exactly that kind and close off the possibility of another, at every level of government in Washington.

Our schools are already short of what students need.

Closing the Funding Gaps is WSPTA's top legislative priority because the distance between what schools cost to run and what the state provides has been widening for years. OSPI's own accounting bears that out. Following the Legislature's response to McCleary, 2019 marked the peak of public school funding in Washington. Adjusted for inflation, state investment has lost ground since. Per-student funding is down roughly $250 from that peak, while costs have climbed, with insurance alone rising by nearly $50 million a year statewide (11).

Basic education is narrowly defined in state law, and some of what schools need most falls outside that definition. School buildings and their upkeep aren't covered by it. Neither are school meals (11).

Districts aren't short of money because they've been careless with it. They're short because what the state sends hasn't kept up with what students need, and the gap compounds every year it isn't closed.

The question in front of voters is whether the state should give up a means of meeting obligations it has not yet met.

A smaller general fund makes securing K-12 funding harder.

WSPTA would have preferred to see this revenue allocated to public education explicitly. It wasn't. But money in the general fund is money we can still fight for, and we intend to.

A larger general fund guarantees schools nothing. What it determines is whether the fight each session is over how much to add or how much to take away. A shrinking fund puts us on defense, protecting funding districts already have instead of closing the gaps they're already carrying.

Removing billions doesn't reduce what students are owed. It means schools compete for a smaller pool against every other obligation the state has to meet. WSPTA will be in Olympia in January asking legislators to do their paramount duty regardless of how November goes. Initiative 645 decides how much they'll have to work with when we get there.

Where WSPTA Stands

School districts across Washington are absorbing years of inadequate funding and painful cuts. The supports that help children arrive at school ready to learn are exposed to further cuts in a way basic education isn't, at a time when they're needed more than ever.

We are not defending how the Millionaire's Tax was allocated. We advocated in February to dedicate a percentage to K-12 education, and we'll do it again in 2027 and beyond. This is the narrower question. The Legislature began building a bridge to an amply funded public education system and stopped halfway. Initiative 645 demolishes what was built and bans an entire category of tools for building another.

Washington State PTA urges members to vote NO on Initiative Measure No. 645. The board recommends that local PTAs and councils adopt this position as their own. Questions about what your PTA may and may not do are answered in our initiative FAQs.

Sources

WSPTA member-adopted documents

1. WSPTA Resolution 18.46 K-12 Education Funding
2. WSPTA Legislative Principles, November 2025
3. WSPTA, *Closing the Funding Gaps*, 2026

4. *A Letter to PTA Members: Our Position on the Proposed Millionaires Tax, WSPTA, February 18, 2026*

The measure and the tax

5. Initiative Measure No. 645, full text
6. Initiative No. 645 Ballot Title Letter
7. ESSB 6346 (chapter 238, Laws of 2026), final text

State fiscal and education sources

8. Office of Financial Management, *Fiscal Impact Statement for Initiative 645*, July 23, 2026
9. Office of Financial Management, *2027–29 Operating, Transportation and Capital Budget Instructions*, June 5, 2026
10. Office of Financial Management, "June revenue forecast shows mixed picture, adds to expected shortfall in coming budget cycle," June 26, 2026
11. Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, *Understanding Public School Funding*