

Sustainable Policies, Sustainable Counties

Counties provide constitutionally and statutorily directed state services to all of Washington's residents. The Washington Association of County Officials (WACO) is working to secure clear and sustainable policies to provide all 39 counties with the foundation to provide sustainable service levels to every Washingtonian. Our elected county officials provide direct services to citizens in support of their health, safety and financial well-being. The membership of the Washington Association of County Officials (WACO) includes elected county assessors, auditors, clerks, coroners and medical examiners, prosecuting attorneys, sheriffs, treasurers and comparable appointed officials in charter counties.

HB 1004 – UPDATING THE PERSONAL PROPERTY TAX THRESHOLD

RCW has long provided relief for small businesses by exempting the first \$15,000 in personal property from taxation, but this was established many years ago and no longer provides the intended relief. As a result, the purchase of one piece of equipment can mean a small business owner transitions from exempt to owing personal property taxes. For smaller businesses, the administrative cost of reporting is often higher than the tax owed, and for County Assessors the administrative cost for small accounts is greater than the tax revenue.

Updating the outdated personal property tax threshold from \$15,000 to \$50,000 will help small businesses and eliminate unnecessary administrative costs and burden for county assessors.

HB 2376 | SB 6162 – MAINTAINING THE SENIOR AND DISABLED VETERAN PROPERTY TAX RELIEF PROGRAM

Over time, the legislature has updated the Senior and Disabled Property Tax Relief Program to ensure it is meeting its intended purpose of providing equitable, meaningful property tax relief and keeping seniors, disabled and disabled veterans in their homes. In order to keep the pace, this year's proposal includes needed increases in qualifying income thresholds; a new, standard deduction option for determining disposable income, and exclusion of combat-related special compensation in determining disposable income.

These proposed adjustments to thresholds and changes in program administration will make it easier for a larger proportion of our seniors, disabled and disabled veterans to take advantage of this program, as intended.

SB 5069 – STATE PRINTING OF PRIMARY VOTERS PAMPHLETS

Currently the state is required to produce a voters' pamphlet for general elections, but not for the primary elections in even-numbered years. While counties may choose to do so themselves and bill the state for their portion of a locally-produced pamphlet, the result is that the information received by voters varies by county, and the cost to counties is collectively higher than if centrally produced and distributed at the state level.

Voters expect and rely upon the information provided in voter pamphlets. Having information on state-level candidates in primary elections should not differ depending on county. This proposal will result in equity of information received by voters and a more cost-effective means of getting it to them.

The Washington Association of County Officials (WACO) joins with Secretary of State Steve Hobbs and the Washington Association of County Auditors (WSACA) in support of this proposal.



HB 2341 | SB 6130 – CELEBRATING NATIONAL VOTER REGISTRATION DAY

RCW currently requires high school voter registration and education events occur annually on Temperance and Good Citizenship Day in January. This proposal would move this to occur on National Voter Registration Day in September to better align with national advocacy efforts already underway and streamline voter education and outreach efforts to achieve higher impact and lower cost.

HB 2543 – ALIGN RCW WITH UPDATED SUPREME COURT RULES RE: COURT EXHIBITS

Supreme Court updated rules now require Clerks to provide copies of all documents and exhibits regardless of format. This includes color copies and photographs of cumbersome exhibits that cannot be color photocopied. These potentially costly new requirements are not included in RCW which authorizes Clerks fees. In addition, language regarding court exhibits is outdated (e.g. compact discs) and would be updated through this proposal.

This proposal will provide County Clerks with the resources to comply with this new Supreme Court requirement.

HB 2419 – CLERK SAFETY ENHANCEMENT

County Clerks are the face of the Superior Court for parties with cases before it. Their names are on all court orders and parties often direct their anger regarding court decisions at them. Many Clerks have faced lawsuits as well as threats of violence and death to themselves and their families. Yet County Clerks are the only court or law enforcement employees not covered in RCW related to unlawful release of personally identifiable information and other protection statutes.

This proposal would simply add County Clerks and their staff to all other law and justice employees protected under RCW.

HB 1002 – PTSD SERVICES FOR MEDICAL DEATH INVESTIGATION AND PATHOLOGY STAFF

Current RCW defines certain mental health or disability conditions as an occupational disease for firefighters, law enforcement, and nurses. Every day, County Coroner and Medical Examiner investigation and pathology staff work on the very same cases that help trigger PTSD related conditions, yet these staff are not afforded the same occupational protections as their peers in the field.

Coroner/ME investigative and pathology staff must be able to access the same occupational services as their colleagues in the field to help prevent burn out, compounded mental health issues, and ongoing effects of PTSD.

HB 2502 – REMOVE LOCAL SALES TAX FROM SALES TAX REBATE FOR RENEWABLE ENERGY PROJECTS

The promise of renewable energy projects to local communities is economic benefit. The reality is that depreciating personal property owned by energy companies is shifting the tax burden to local residents. Additionally, there are millions of dollars in lost local sales tax revenue due to state-established refunds. Together, these provisions in law are harming, not helping, local communities. State lawmakers may provide relief from state sales tax to incentivize these projects, but local communities need to decide for themselves the right balance of incentive and revenue.

This proposal retains the state's ability to incentivize clean energy programs with a state sales tax refund, but allows local government discretion with regard to local sales tax refunds.

Klickitat County recently refunded nearly \$1 Million in local sales tax revenue to a single project. This represented 27% of their annual budgeted sales tax revenue. From 2014-2019, Columbia County refunded 48% of sales tax collected. This is not just a small, rural county issue. As clean energy projects continue to grow statewide, more counties will be impacted without local discretion.

The Washington Association of County Officials (WACO) joins with the Washington State Association of County Treasurers in supporting this proposal.

