

WA State NOW - Legislative Update March 10, 2001

Legislative Hotline 1(800) 562-6000

Call to leave a message for your elected officials

Legislative Calendar – Thursday, March 08, 2001 was the deadline for all bills to pass out of the fiscal committee in the house of origin. If a bill is not currently in the Rules or passed in the house of origin, it is now dead.

Wednesday, March 14th is the deadline for bills to be voted out of the house of origin.

Priority Message of the Week (If you can only do one thing, do this!)

SSB 5201 – Increasing access to education for recipients of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). (SUPPORT) This bill is also known as the HELP (Higher Education for Lifelong Progress) bill. This bill would give parents on public assistance the tools they need to secure careers and move themselves out of poverty. A recipient could receive up to two years of higher education and training. Clients in the HELP program are not subject to additional TANF work requirements: full time participation in the HELP program counts as their work, and is a statutory work activity. SSB 5201 has passed out of Ways and Means Committee and is now in Rules and can be voted on by the Senate. Call your senator to support and vote for SSB 5201.

Health Care

Assure equal access to quality affordable and accessible health care services for women and children.

1. Contraceptive coverage needs to be easily accessible to everyone in the state. Washington State NOW believes that any health care plan that covers prescription drugs must include contraceptive coverage as a part of that coverage.
2. WA State NOW supports access for all women to the full range of reproductive services. WA State NOW will defend a woman's right to choose, opposing any attempts to weaken the current law as passed by Initiative 120.

SB 5186 Modifying department of social and health services' family planning services (SUPPORT). This bill creates a waiver to allow Medicaid coverage for contraceptive and sterilization services for persons with family incomes at or below two hundred percent of the federal poverty level. SB 5186 has passed the Senate with a vote of 28 yeas to 19 nays and sent to the House of Representatives.

SHB 1058 – Relating to medical assistance for breast and cervical cancer treatment for low-income women. (SUPPORT) This bill allows low-income women to receive medical assistance for the treatment of breast and cervical cancer. **This bill did not pass out of the Appropriations Committee and is now dead.**

SSSB 5820 – Relating to medical assistance for breast and cervical cancer treatment for low-income women. (SUPPORT) This bill allows low-income women to receive medical assistance for the treatment of breast and cervical cancer. SSSB 5820 is in Rules and can be voted on at any time. Call your Senator to support SSSB5820 and to pass it out of the Senate and on to the House.

SSB 5416 – Relating to drug affected infants. (BILL NEEDS MODIFICATIONS) This bill was unanimously passed out of the Senate and is now in the House Children & Family Services Committee. This bill sets up procedures for identifying and screening pregnant and lactating women to determine whether an infant is at risk of drug affected due to the mother's use of non-prescriptive addictive drugs. NOW's concern with the mandatory section of this bill is that drug affected mothers would not seek pre-natal care or post-natal care due to the mandatory testing. Mothers of drug affected infants can agree to treatment which as a condition that can defer a dependency action. The conditions vary depending on the number of drug-affected infants the mother has had. Mothers must also be offered family planning services. Providers (both individuals and agencies) may choose not to provide family planning services. Imposing barriers to contraception thwarts the very purpose of the family planning services proposed in this bill. We support the program components of the bill but not the mandatory testing or the conscience clause that allows providers to opt out of the family planning services. **Call your Representatives and tell them you support amendments to SSB 5416 to remove the conscience clause and make the testing voluntary.**

Economic Equity

WA State NOW supports economic equity for all women.

1. Welfare Reform
 - a) Washington State National Organization for Women is committed to achieving an economic equity reality for all women and supports changes in the WorkFirst program to assist families move up and out of poverty.
- SSB 5201 – Increasing access to education for recipients of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). (SUPPORT) See Priority message of the week.**
2. Child Care
 - a) NOW supports childcare support programs for low-income families. Families at or below the poverty level should not have to make co-payments and for those above the poverty level no more than 10 percent of their income should be allowed as co-payments
 3. Family Leave
 - a) NOW supports expanding the Family and Medical Leave Act to create family friendly policies in the workplace.
 - b) NOW supports a Family Leave Insurance program that provide up to five weeks of partial wage replacement for workers on family or medical leave, and extend job protections to workers of any size company

All Family Leave bills are dead.

Ending Violence Against Women

Washington State NOW supports efforts to end violence against women and their families in the areas of sexual assault and domestic violence

1. Modify WA State's unemployment compensation laws to allow claimant's to qualify for unemployment by adding a clause to the statute that would allow the individual to receive unemployment when they leave work due to domestic violence, sexual assault, or stalking.
2. Support modification to the Domestic Violence and Stalking laws as they apply to Protection and Anti-Harassment orders to:
 - a) Add a "bubble standard" which would require the stalker or assailant to be no closer than a specified number of feet to the victim.
 - b) Close the gap to expand the coverage of Protection Orders on released prisoners so that the release orders and protection orders do not override and therefore vacate the protection order.
 - c) Allow minors to obtain anti-harassment orders
3. Protect domestic violence victims from eviction due to the violence and police visits.
4. Pass legislation that provides privileged communication between domestic violence victim advocates and victims similar to what is already in the statute for sexual assault victims.
5. Support use of surplus Welfare Reform funds to provide services for children who are in or have been in domestic violence situations and need help.
6. Support the Sexual Assault programs request for state funding to support community sexual assault programs so to provide legal advocacy and therapeutic services for sexual assault victims and to fund a statewide hotline for sexual assault victims.

SB 5189 - Allowing victims of domestic violence or stalking to receive unemployment insurance benefits. (SUPPORT) This bill allows individuals to qualify for unemployment insurance when the unemployment is necessary to protect the claimant or a member of their immediate family from domestic violence or stalking. SB 5189 has passed the Senate and has been sent to the House. All Democrats except for Senator Tim Sheldon voted for the bill. Republican Senators Winsley and Carlson voted for the bill. It passed 26 Yea, 23 No. SB 5189 is now in the House Commerce and Labor Committee.

ESSB 5528 - Requiring policies prohibiting harassment, intimidation, and bullying on school grounds and at school activities. This bill requires schools to develop policies to prohibit harassment, intimidation, and bullying on school grounds and at school activities. SSB 5528 has passed out of the Senate and is now in the House Education

Committee. ESSB 5528 is a weakened version of the original SB 5528. The bill needs to be strengthened regarding at risk categories. NOW is working with the Attorney General's office and other advocacy groups to develop amendment language to strengthen the bill.

SB 5451 - Relating to actions for crimes of violence motivated by gender (SUPPORT) - This bill would codify into Washington State Law the ability for individuals to sue in civil court for gender-motivated violence. This bill was requested by the Attorney General's office due to the US Supreme Court decision on May 15, 2000 in *Brzonkala v. Morrison* which overturned the civil remedies part of the Federal Violence Against Women Act citing that the US Congress overstepped its bounds in regards to allowing the civil remedy. The US Supreme Court ruled that this was a State's rights issue and that it was a state's responsibility to determine if victims could sue their attackers in a state's court for damages. Passed out of committee and is in Senate Rules. This bill is expected to pass the Senate. **If you haven't called your Senator on this bill, call before March 14 to support and vote for SB 5451.**

Privacy

Washington State National Organization for Women (NOW) supports legislation that assures individuals the right to privacy

1. Consumers should have the right to prevent financial institutions and businesses from giving or selling personal financial information to telemarketers.
2. Organizations conducting business on-line should be required to disclose how they collect and use personal data.
3. Confidentiality about medical records and decisions must be strictly maintained between the patient and his/her doctor.

Budget

NOW supports adjusting the 601 spending limit to eliminate re-basing and to change the spending cap formula to reflect the program growth that drives state spending (such as corrections and long term care, for example).

Other Bills:

SSB 5236 Relating to the safety of newborn children (SUPPORT). This bill applies to abandoned babies and exempts from criminal liability persons who abandon them into the custody of a qualified person. SSB 5236 has passed the Senate and has been sent to the House of Representatives.

SB 5232 Relating to the eligibility of individuals for public employees' benefits board insurance benefits (OPPOSE) If passed, this bill would put a referendum on the November 2001 ballot to reverse the December 2000 Public Employee's Benefit Board decision to extend benefits to the domestic partners of state employees. The bill also declares an intent that eligibility for these benefits is limited to the lawful spouse and dependent children of state employees only. This bill was written as a referendum because the sponsors know that Governor Locke would veto it. **SB 5232 did not pass out of the Senate Ways and Means Committee and is dead.**