

WA State NOW - Legislative Update April 24, 2001

Legislative Hotline 1(800) 562-6000

Call to leave a message for your elected officials

The legislature adjourned the 2001 regular legislative session on Sunday, April 22nd and will reconvene in special session beginning Wednesday, April 25th.

Several issues need to be resolved before the legislature can go home including the biennial operating budget, transportation budget and capitol budget. In addition there are several key pieces of legislation that the Governor and House and Senate leadership would like to see addressed: special sex offender housing; water control; shoreline management and education accountability.

Once the special session begins, they have thirty days to complete their work. They can finish before the thirty days is up. If they are not finished after the first 30 days the Governor can call another thirty-day session (he can only call them in for thirty days at a time). A biennial budget must be in place by June 30th since July 1st is the beginning of the biennial fiscal year.

The House Appropriations co-chairs are expected to brief their caucuses on the joint budget they have (or will have) created on April 25th. If the caucuses give the go ahead, a press conference and public release will take place on Thursday and the full House vote could take place on Friday. (All dates regarding the House budget are, of course, subject to change without much notice!).

Once the House passes a budget the negotiations with the Senate will begin.

It is critical that all of us who work in or support health and social services programs call, write, email, fax and/or visit our legislators with the message to pass a final budget that does not sacrifice the neediest individuals in our state.

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).

The information below summarizes the strengths and weaknesses in both the original budget submitted by the Governor and as passed by the Senate.

Problems in the Senate version of the budget:

1. There is a large increase in Basic Health Plan co-pays and premiums (same as in Gov. Locke's proposed budget)
2. Cap on Children's Health Insurance Program (same as in Gov Locke's proposed budget)
3. Although the budget gives state employee's the same salary increase as teachers (3.7% and 3.1% based on Seattle Consumer Price Index), it only provides about half as much for vendors.
4. Sets a \$5 fee per credit hour for people attending community colleges to get their GED.

Missing in Senate budget:

1. \$400,000 for foster care recruitment (in Governor's budget)
2. \$808,000 for Medicaid expansion for Foster Youth (in Governor's budget)

3. Funding to protect Early Childhood Education & Assistance Program slots \$3 million (not in Governor's either)
4. Funding for the Women Infants & Children program (not in the Governor's budget either)
5. \$140,000 for children's mental health study (not in the Governor's budget either)
6. \$2.4 million for domestic violence shelters (part of capitol budget - not in the Governor's budget either)

Problems in Governor's budget which were fixed in Senate's version of the budget:

1. Restores adult dental program for Medicaid recipients
2. Restores adult vision program for Medicaid recipients
3. Reduces the \$34 million proposed cut in the Medically Indigent program down to a \$3 million cut
4. Restores most of the CHORE cut
5. Funds \$42 million for transition programs for the developmentally disabled. (Requires the funds come out of existing county resources AND the total needed for developmentally disabled school graduates is \$7.9 million).
6. Funds overnight youth shelters at \$240,000
7. Increases tobacco prevention state plan by \$2.5 million per year (would be \$17.5 million if enacted).
8. Includes \$1 million for Emergency Food Assistance Program
9. Restores the adult day health program
10. Provides \$5 million in the Capitol budget to expand college based childcare centers
11. Increases money for the Community Services Facilities Program by \$4.16 million (capitol budget)
12. Brings housing Trust Fund up to \$78 million (capitol budget)
13. Funds a set aside in the Housing Trust Fund for Developmental Disabilities
14. Provides \$380,000 for sexual assault program legal advocates (total needed for every program to have one is \$1 million)
15. Respite funds for foster parents at \$2.4 million (total needed is 3.4 million)
16. \$1.05 million for kinship placements (need is \$8.9 million)

Good things in both the Governor's and Senate's versions of the budget:

1. Ticket to Work for folks with developmental and mental health issues - \$2.6 million. This allows individuals with developmental disabilities and mental health issues to continue receiving Medicaid funding while working.
2. Passport program for foster kids – \$966,000
3. Provides for caseload reductions in the Division of Children & Family Services
4. Child Placing Agency rate increase
5. \$2.578 million for breast and cervical cancer treatment
6. Medicaid coverage for Dental sealants – \$61,000
7. Funding to implement anti-bullying training and program in the public schools.