



POLICY BRIEF

Washington Policy Center victories in the 2024 legislative session

By Paul Guppy,
Senior Researcher

September 2024

Key Findings

1. The Washington legislative session started on January 8th and ended on March 8th. Democrats held a majority of 58-40 in the House and 29-20 in the Senate.
2. WPC experts were a key source of timely research throughout the session. We were invited to testify at committee hearings 35 times, published 23 Legislative Memos, distributed 108 bill analyses as blogs online, placed 74 guest op-eds for publication and were cited in news coverage 579 times (more than five times a day).
3. Over the two-month session Washington Policy Center's work earned widespread media coverage, including 55 TV news citations, 261 radio appearances, over 100,000 video views on social media and more than 124,000 visits to WPC's website.
4. Lawmakers passed three popular citizens' initiatives that reflect WPC long-standing policy recommendations on banning a state income tax, protecting parental rights and re-authorizing reasonable police pursuits.
5. Lawmakers also adopted WPC's recommended positions on charter school funding, increasing affordable health care, protecting democracy and election integrity, and protecting property rights.
6. WPC's work helped defeat bad legislation by stopping a ban on private health insurance, protecting the state's Unemployment Insurance program, and defending tax-limitations for small businesses and homeowners.



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Introduction

The 2024 Washington state legislative session convened on January 8th and adjourned on March 8th. During the session Democrats controlled the House and the Senate and the governor's office. Democrats held a 58-40 majority in the House and a 29-20 majority in the senate.

WPC experts testified by invitation 35 times at public hearings before legislative committees, published 23 Legislative Memo analyses of the most important bills, appeared on radio, TV news and online news shows 579 times, distributed 108 blogs on social media and produced 10 On The Go live Facebook events. In addition, WPC provided nine weekly video updates of legislative actions and published 74 guest op-eds in statewide newspapers and online news sites. WPC experts also worked with individual lawmakers in response to requests for information and research.

Summary of Washington Policy Center's Legislative Impact January – March 2024

- Testified 35 times
- Published 23 Legislative Memos
- Earned 579 media hits
- Posted 108 blogs
- Published 74 guest op-eds
- Produced 9 Weekly Legislative Update videos

Washington Policy Center's impact

During the 2024 legislative session the policy position recommended by Washington Policy Center prevailed on a number of bills. In addition to timely and fact-based analysis, WPC experts served as a resource for lawmakers and presented their findings at public hearings. Following are several examples, presented in random order, of policy decisions made by the legislature that either adopted reforms recommended by WPC or defeated proposals that WPC had recommended against passing.

Citizens' initiatives supported by Washington Policy Center research that qualified for the ballot

Six popular citizens' initiatives qualified for consideration in the legislative session and were recommended by Washington Policy Center research. Lawmakers passed three of these measures (described below).

Democratic leaders, however, refused to hold public hearings on the three other popular measures and instead forwarded those to voters on the November ballot. The three WPC-recommended initiatives that have been forwarded to voters are:

I-2109 - to repeal the capital gains income tax

Citizens' Initiative 2109 received over 433,000 signatures and was strongly supported by WPC research. Our Legislative Memo analysis informed lawmakers about how the tax is harming the state's business climate by driving away investment and job growth. On February 16th WPC released a Fact-Check Report showing that one Democratic lawmaker's claim that I-2109 would cut education funding is untrue. I-2109 is on the November ballot and WPC plans to publish more research to inform the public about this important proposal.

I-2117 – To repeal the Climate Commitment Act (carbon tax)

Citizens' Initiative 2117 received over 469,000 signatures and was strongly supported by WPC research. Our Legislative Memo on the measure briefed lawmakers about how the carbon tax is increasing the cost of gas and all other sources of energy. Our studies released on January 3rd and March 15th also showed how the carbon tax increases inflation and falls hardest on low-income and working families. In addition, WPC published a Fact-Check Report by expert Todd Myers on February 22nd corrected many of the false claims being made by opponents of I-2117.

I-2124 – To allow workers to opt out of LTC payroll tax

Citizens' Initiative 2124 received nearly 425,000 signatures and was strongly backed by WPC research. Our Legislative Memo briefed lawmakers on how the measure would allow workers to opt-out of the unpopular program if they so choose. WPC published additional findings for lawmakers on December 28th, January 4th, January 26th, and February 8th. In addition, on February 29th WPC health care expert Elizabeth New released a Fact-Check Report responding to false information about the measure's true impact.

Good bills the legislature passed that reflect Washington Policy Center recommendations

I-2111 - Banned state and local income taxes

Citizens' Initiative 2111 received over 446,000 signatures and was strongly supported by WPC research as good public policy for our state. A WPC legislative analysis informed lawmakers that income tax proposals have been defeated by voters 10 times over the years, and that a state and local income tax ban had broad bipartisan support across the state. On February 27th WPC expert Elizabeth New testified in support of the measure before the Joint Committee on Finance. WPC published further information about the measure on December 21st (leading up to the session) and on February 28th and March 4th. The income tax ban passed by wide margins on March 4th; by a vote of 38 to 11 in the Senate and 76 to 21 in the House.

I-2113 - Authorized reasonable police pursuit

Citizens' Initiative 2113 received over 434,000 signatures and was strongly supported by WPC research. Our Legislative Memo reported on the harm done to public safety by the passage in 2021 of HB 1054, which barred the police from chasing criminals in most cases. Further data was published on March 5th. WPC's research showed that thousands of crimes would be prevented if police were again allowed to pursue criminals based on a reasonable suspicion of illegal activity. The measure passed by a vote of 36 to 13 in the Senate and a vote of 77 to 20 in the House.

I-2081 – Protected parental rights in schools

Citizens' Initiative 2081 received over 454,000 signatures and was strongly supported by WPC research. Our Legislative Memo briefed lawmakers about ongoing cultural controversies that harm education and have led to 46,000 families leaving the public education system. On February 28th WPC provided testimony at a public hearing before the House Committee on Education, and followed up with additional published research a week later. The measure was passed into law by large bi-partisan majorities in the House and Senate.

HB 2295 – Funded hospital at-home services

In 2020 Washington received a waiver to allow federal funding to be used to provide patients with hospital services at home. The idea was to free up hospital space for expected COVID-19 patients. As it turned out, hospitals were not overwhelmed and the additional space was not needed, but WPC research showed the program provided better-quality hospital services for patients in a home environment. On January 11th HB 2295 was introduced to allow the state to continue the program. On January 24th WPC health care expert Elizabeth New presented her findings at a public hearing of the House Health Care and Wellness Committee, followed by publication and widespread distribution of her research. The bill was approved by lawmakers and signed into law by Governor Inslee on March 26th.

HB 1917 – Cut regulations on hiring physician assistants

During the COVID-19 pandemic Governor Inslee eased state rules that prevent Washington hospitals and clinics from hiring qualified medical staff from out of state. Noting that all patients, not just those with COVID-19, would benefit, WPC recommended that state lawmakers make this deregulation permanent by joining a multi-state compact that recognizes the licenses of out-of-state physician assistants. HB1917 to implement this policy was pre-filed on December 7th. WPC published research in support of the idea on December 8th and February 5th. The bill passed and the governor signed it on March 13th.

SB 5920 – Repealed Certificate of Need rules for psychiatric hospitals

WPC has long recommended that Washington repeal its restrictive Certificate of Need (CON) law that prevents new hospitals from opening or expanding without first getting state permission. On December 29th SB 5920 was introduced to repeal the CON requirement for psychiatric facilities. On January 17th WPC published an analysis in support of the bill, and on January 18th health care expert Elizabeth New presented her findings at a meeting of the Senate Health and Long-Term Care Committee. In early February, WPC sent follow-up data to all lawmakers in a Legislative Memo publication. The bill passed with broad bipartisan support in the Senate on February 7th (by a vote of 47 to 0), and in the House on February 29th (by a vote of 96 to 0). Governor Inslee signed the bill on March 18th.

SB 5792 - Promoted affordable housing by cutting regulations

SB 5792 was pre-filed on December 4th. On December 12th WPC expert Mark Harmsworth published an analysis in support of the bill that went to all lawmakers and staff. Once the formal legislative session started SB 5792 was referred to the Senate Law and Justice Committee. WPC continued to bring public attention to the bill and to urge lawmakers to reduce permitting and regulation barriers to affordable housing. The bill passed the Senate of February 6th and passed the House on March 1st. As a positive step in cutting costly housing regulations, Governor Inslee signed the bill on March 15th.

HB 1897 – Helped equalize funding for charter school children

WPC has consistently argued against the state's discriminatory policy that cuts funding for charter school children compared to the per-student funding other public schools receive. On February 1st, WPC's education expert, Liv Finne, presented findings to the House Appropriations Committee in support of HB 1897, a bill to provide enrichment funding for charter public schools to partially make up for the shortfall. Provisions of the bill were included in the 2023-25 supplemental budget (SB 5950) and provided an additional \$8 million, or roughly \$1,600 more per student, for the state's charter school families. The additional funding will benefit 4,800 students in 18 charter schools. Governor Inslee signed the budget bill on March 29th.

HB 2424 – Improved management of gray wolf populations

HB 2424 was introduced in mid-January to update cooperative agreements between the federal government, the state and local authorities to monitor and

control wild gray wolf packs. The bill was strongly supported by WPC’s research which found that formerly-endangered gray wolf populations are recovering rapidly in Washington and that tribes and local governments need better tools for managing problem wolves who threaten public safety. WPC provided lawmakers with published findings on the topic on January 15th, with updates provided on January 26th and February 9th. The bill passed both house by wide margins and was signed by the governor on March 26th.

SB 5972 – Preserved farmers’ ability to use safe pesticides

SB 5972 was introduced on January 4th with the purpose of banning all effective use of neonicotinoid-based pesticides. Proponents said the bill was necessary to protect pollinating bees on Washington farmland. Research published by WPC found that the sweeping bill would also ban safe pesticides that are used in a controlled, limited way. Lawmakers amended the bill to take these findings into account, and the bill passed both houses by large bipartisan margins. The governor signed the bill on March 28th.

Bad bills the legislature did not pass, in accord with Washington Policy Center recommendations

WPC fact-based research and media efforts to inform the public helped stop passage of the following harmful bills.

SB 5770 – Preserved voter-approved property tax limit

SB 5770 was introduced in the closing days of the 2023 session and was revived in 2024, but due in part to WPC’s work the measure failed to pass. The bill sought to overturn a 2001 voter-approved tax limit policy that holds annual increases in property tax collections to no more than 1% per year. Democratic leaders announced SB 5770 as one of their “top priorities” for the 2024 session. Republicans called it “the worst bill of the session.” In January WPC expert Mark Harmsworth authored a Legislative Memo analysis of the bill, and on January 18th and February 14th published further research online that went to all lawmakers and committee staff. Mark also presented his findings at a public hearing of the Senate Ways and Means Committee. Despite the strong efforts of Democrat leaders they were forced to concede to public pressure and the bill died in committee on February 15th.

HB 2114 – Stopped effort to impose statewide rent control

At the start of the session passing this bill was a major priority for Democratic leaders. WPC has a long record as the primary independent source of data on the economic damage caused by rent control, and how it harms access to affordable housing. WPC economics expert Mark Harmsworth provided lawmakers with a detailed analysis of the bill on February 14th, with additional data published on February 26th. The bill passed in the House, but the strong response of opponents raised doubts about rent control and the bill later died in the Senate Ways and Means Committee.

SJM 8006 – Stopped a plan to ban private health insurance

Senate Joint Memorial 8006 called on the federal government to ban private health insurance and require all Americans to join a socialist “universal” health care program. Building on her past research, WPC expert Elizabeth New published a Legislative Memo on the measure and on February 16th provided lawmakers with additional commentary online. On February 19th the measure was sent to the Senate Rules Committee where it died on March 7th.

HB 2150 – Helped keep Donald Trump’s name from being taken off the ballot

HB 2150 was introduced on January 4th to ban the name of the leading Republican candidate for president from the state’s 2024 general election ballot. The bill was targeted at anyone who had supposedly “engaged in insurrection or rebellion” against the United State or who had been “charged and not yet acquitted of a federal crime”. WPC published a Legislative Memo analysis of the bill on March 4th noting that it was undemocratic and likely unconstitutional. WPC showed that the bill was proposed by Democrats to prevent Republicans (or anyone else) from voting for the Republican nominee. The bill died in the Senate State Government and Tribal Relations Committee.

HB 1959 – Protected family-leave tax exemption for small employers

When lawmakers imposed a new payroll tax on workers to fund a family-leave entitlement, they knew they were increasing the financial burden on low-income workers and small businesses. So they promised that small employers with 50 or fewer workers would be exempt. HB 1959 was introduced on December 15th with the intention of breaking that promise and imposing the tax on small employers. WPC expert Elizabeth New “blew the whistle” on the bill in a widely-distributed blog she posted on January 15, two days before a scheduled hearing in the House Labor and Workplace Standards Committee. Soon afterwards Democratic leaders transferred the bill to the House Appropriations Committee where it died on January 30th. Due in part to WPC’s work, lawmakers were forced to keep their promise to small business owners.

HB 1843 – Retained the 60% taxpayer protection requirement for school bonds

HB 1843 would have weakened taxpayer protections by lowering the vote threshold needed to take on more school bond debt from 60% to 55%. Research published by WPC showed that the current level of taxpayer protection is working well, that the 60% voter threshold is popular, and that it is particularly effective at protecting low-income families and older citizens living on fixed incomes. The bill was introduced on January 8th. On January 15th WPC expert Liv Finne testified against the bill at a public hearing held by the House Education Committee. Shortly afterwards House leaders decided against scheduling the bill for action and it died in committee.

HB 2030 – Protected election integrity

WPC protected the integrity of elections by helping to defeat the misleading “Free the Vote Act,” a bill to allow prisoners serving time in jail to vote. The bill was introduced as a pre-filed bill on December 22nd and referred to the House State Government and Tribal Relations Committee. The Committee held a public hearing on January 16th and it appeared the bill was moving forward. On January 24th, however, WPC published a bill analysis showing it would erode voter rights, undermine democracy and harm the integrity of Washington elections. Democratic leaders decided to take no further action and the bill died in committee.

HB 1868 – prevented a ban on small gas-powered outdoor equipment

This bill was pre-filed on December 5th. WPC strongly opposed it as impractical and costly. WPC research published on January 3rd reported that electric leaf blowers are not significantly quieter than gas-powered blowers (61 decibels vs. 70 decibels) and that a ban would not reduce pollution in any meaningful way. A detailed Legislative Memo analysis published later in January showed lawmakers how HB 1868 would drive up costs for homeowners, lawn maintenance companies and a host of other businesses. In March the bill died in the House Environment and Energy Committee.

HB 2058 – Stopped bill to weaken families by displacing parents as the primary providers of daily nutrition

This bill was introduced in the House Education Committee on January 8th. Its sponsor sought to divide children from their parents by automatically putting every public school student on the welfare free lunch program. On January 30th an analysis published by WPC education expert Liv Finne noted the harmful impact this would have on families. She also noted it showed that some lawmakers had no faith that parents can care for their children. The legislature took no further action and the bill died in the House Appropriations Committee.

HB 2276 – Helped stop increases in the cost of buying a home

This dishonest bill was introduced on January 10th with the misleading title “Increasing the supply of affordable and workforce housing” by claiming it cut the sales tax on homes sold for between \$525,000 and \$750,000. WPC expert Mark Harmsworth noted that bill’s sponsor downplayed the provision of his bill that would raise the sales tax on properties valued at \$3 million or more. A WPC bill analysis published on January 17th showed that HB 2276 would raise rents and cost condo buyers in a building valued at \$7.5 million at least \$4,250 each. WPC was the only source that revealed how the bill would make housing more expensive, not more affordable. The bill died in the House Rules Committee on February 26th.

HB 2323 – Protected landlords from having to report on-time rent payments, but not late payments

This bill was introduced on January 11th and referred to the House Committee on Housing. It would have required landlords to report on-time rent payments to a nationwide consumer credit agency. A bill analysis published by WPC analyst Mark Harmsworth on January 22nd found that the bill would also prevent landlords from

reporting late or missing rent payments, creating a false credit report for renters. He also found that it created a burdensome mandate for property owners, and exposed landlords to lawsuits for mis-reporting personal credit information. The bill died in the House Rules Committee on February 20th.

SB 5427 – Ended a program to pay a \$2,000 bounty to people who report their neighbors on a special “hate crimes” hotline

SB 5427 was introduced on January 17th to create a special hotline at the Attorney General’s office and pay up to \$2,000 to informants who report their neighbors for “hate crimes” and “bias incidents.” WPC strongly opposed this idea because crimes can already be reported to 911. Therefore a policy of offering a cash reward for speech offenses is clearly designed to incite division, jealousy and false reporting in communities across the state. In January a Legislative Memo on the bill by WPC analyst Liv Finne was sent to all legislative offices and was posted online. WPC’s work was also picked up by the Babylon Bee website and received national attention. As a result sponsors amended the bill. It was passed and signed by Governor Inslee after the cash bounty program had been removed. The bill’s “hotline” uses the same no-bounty reporting policy as existing 911 calls.

HB 2474 – Protected property rights and local zoning from centralized bureaucrats

HB 2474 was introduced on January 24th and referred to the House Committee on Housing. The bill would have allowed bureaucrats at the state Department of Commerce to override the zoning decisions of local governments and violate local property rights by siting homeless housing anywhere the Department liked. WPC opposed the idea not only because it would add another layer of needless regulation, but because it interfered with democracy. A principle of self-government is that local officials should be responsive and answerable to the people they serve, not to bureaucrats in the state capital. WPC expert Mark Harmsworth made these points in a bill analysis published on February 17th. The bill passed the House but died in the Senate Local Government, Land Use and Tribal Affairs Committee on February 20th.

HB 2476 – Prevented a per-person annual “covered lives” tax

HB 2476 was introduced on January 25th to impose a “covered lives” tax on hospitals and clinics for every Medicaid patient they served. The new tax would be on top of the state’s 2% monthly premium tax charged on all health insurance policies. In February WPC health care expert Elizabeth New released a bill analysis showing how the bill would drive up health care costs. Shortly afterwards, the bill died in the House Appropriations Committee.

SB 5777 (HB 1893) – Prevented unions from tapping the state Unemployment Insurance fund when they go on strike

This bill was pre-filed on December 4th and referred to the Senate Labor and Commerce Committee. The bill would have taken money from the state Unemployment Insurance fund to make payments to workers who go on strike voluntarily. Labor union leaders said passage of the bill was their top priority because it would let them tap public funds when unions decide to go on strike.

In January WPC's worker rights expert Elizabeth New published a Legislative Memo on the bill and followed up with regular updates published on January 11th, February 13th and March 15th. She also presented her findings at a meeting of the House Appropriations Committee on February 2nd. The bill later died in the House Rules Committee.

SB 6064 - Stopped pets from being banned in apartments

This bill would have imposed an arbitrary cap of \$150 on pet deposits in apartments and other rental property. Since pets can cause much more damage than that the bill would have effectively banned renters from owning dogs, cats and other pets. The bill was introduced on January 9th, and referred to the Senate Committee on Housing. On January 22nd WPC expert Mark Harmsworth published a description of the bill and the negative effect it would have on pet owners. Democratic leaders had scheduled the bill for action on January 31st. Instead they cancelled the planned meeting and the bill died in committee.

HB 2191 – Prevented radical activists from being appointed to local transit governing boards

HB 2191 was introduced on January 5th to force local transit agencies to accept a minimum of two political activists as governing board members. Research presented to lawmakers by WPC expert Charles Prestrud on January 22nd showed that transit agencies already have citizen committees to provide community input. WPC's findings also showed that governing boards are supposed to provide agency oversight, not advance pre-set political agendas, and that adding non-elected appointees would reduce public accountability. The bill passed the House on February 8th and died in the Senate Rules Committee on March 7th.

HB 2497 – Stopped creation of a “Work Group” to raise taxes for the ferry system

HB 2497 was introduced on February 10th to create a “Ferries 75 Work Group” to promote a tax increase for the ferry system. Public testimony presented on February 14th by WPC transportation expert Charles Prestrud to the House Transportation Committee showed that state officials had already completed studies in 2009 and again in 2019 on how to fix ferry services. WPC's research found that HB 2497 would do nothing to solve operational mismanagement at the agency. As a result the bill failed to gain bi-partisan support. Shortly after the February 14th hearing the bill died in committee.

HB 1900 – Protected food safety by stopping mandatory recycling law

HB 1900, called the WRAP Act, was introduced on December 6th to increase mandatory recycling of consumer plastics. WPC agriculture expert Pam Lewison notified lawmakers through research published on January 9th and in person that the bill would endanger food safety by banning single-use plastic wrapping for fruits, vegetables and other fresh produce. This research was made available to lawmakers at a public hearing of the House Environment and Energy Committee held on January 11th. Lawmakers decided to take no further action on the bill and it, along with two similar bills, HB 2049 and SB 6005, died in committee.

Protected the sale of ethical fur products

SB 6294 would have banned the “unlawful trade in fur products” in Washington. Research published on January 24th by WPC’s Pam Lewison pointed out that the bill is directed at products the sponsors found morally objectionable, yet there are no special bills to ban the “unlawful” trade in fake diamonds, stolen cars or other morally ambiguous products. WPC notified lawmakers that the bill is really directed against farmers and ranchers who ethically raise fur animals in Washington state. WPC has reported that humanely raising animals for their fur is no different than raising animals for food. Shortly after WPC’s findings were published the bill died in the Senate Business, Financial Services, Gaming and Trade Committee. Defeat of the bill helped counter the ongoing attack on Washington’s agricultural community by Seattle-based lawmakers.

SJR 8207 – Saved taxpayer protections for imposing long-term public debt

This measure was introduced on December 8th. It would have repealed taxpayer protections by lowering the voter threshold from 60% to 50% for a school district to raise property taxes and issue long-term debt. WPC’s Legislative Memo showed lawmakers that super-majority votes are a common part of democracy and that the taxpayer protection standard of 60% is popular and serves the common good. On January 11th WPC expert Liv Finne presented her findings at a public hearing of the Senate Early Learning and K-12 Education Committee. The Chair of this committee strongly supported the bill and planned to pass it out of her committee. Instead Senate leaders decided to transfer the measure to the Ways and Means Committee where it died on January 15th.

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