

## Notes from Olympia December 18, 2020

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### Trivia...

We have entered the “prefiling” period for bills. During the month leading up to legislative session, legislators can “pre-file” their proposed bills for consideration during legislative session.

As I am reviewing bills dealing with issues ranging from mandatory Covid vaccinations to limits on gubernatorial emergency powers, I was reminded there are a lot of state laws that have perhaps outlived their time. I found a website “Weird Facts” that contains some of the weirdest Washington state laws. Now I did not fact check these, so they could or could not be true. So, behave accordingly. Answers at the end...

### Logistics...

For those who do not care for change (like this author), the adjustments required for a state legislature to conduct its business largely virtually are significant. The leadership and staff of the Washington State Legislature have been working tirelessly to establish protocols that first protect public health and also allow for continuation of the people’s business in a transparent and inclusive manner.

Both the Senate and House of Representatives have released their protocols for the 2021 legislative session. Following are some highlights:

- TVW ([tvw.org](http://tvw.org)) will cover all legislative activity.
- On the first day of session (January 11<sup>th</sup>), the House of Representatives will gather at St. Martin’s University in Thurston County for a socially distanced swearing in and the adoption of rules. For the Senate, the first day will require an in-person quorum of at

least 25 members to vote on changes to Senate Rules. This will also involve social distancing.

- Note, that at all times, the Capitol facilities are closed to the public. Only limited, essential staff and specified legislators are permitted on campus. Do not think about sneaking in – they have cameras!
- Both bodies will conduct all legislative committees virtually. Sign-ups for testimony will open 24 hours prior to the hearing. This will significantly increase the ability for people statewide to engage in legislative committee testimony.
- For the House, during floor sessions (when votes on bills are taken), only the Presiding officer, minority leader and caucus leadership are allowed on the floor. The Senate is encouraging legislators and staff to work remotely, but is operating in a hybrid manner and will have some Senators in person for voting, ensuring they are socially distanced.
- There is the expectation that floor actions will take significantly more time due to the largely virtual nature. As a result, the weekly schedules have shifted to add more time for floor session (the typical Friday afternoon commute time is now slated for caucus and floor session, for example). Also, the “cut-off” schedules have been adjusted to shorten the timing for policy committee meetings to allow for more floor session time.
- Legislators have also been provided direction about bills. They are encouraged to introduce a limited number of bills (going back to the time constraints); “companion bills” (where the same bill is introduced in the Senate and the House to increase the odds of passage) are discouraged; and a number of filters have been suggested for bills – does the bill relate to Covid recovery?; does the bill advance racial equity?; if there is a budget impact, have the budget chairs been consulted?

### Governor Inslee Releases Proposed Budget

On December 17<sup>th</sup>, Governor Jay Inslee unveiled his proposed 2021-23, \$57.6 billion budget. Not surprisingly, the budget focuses squarely on the state’s recovery from the Covid pandemic, with proposed investments in a number of areas such as business relief, public health, rental assistance and child care.

Governor Inslee led off the week with announcements around his commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion – highlighting proposed investments including those to support community-based organizations, investments in broadband and funding for the state’s new Equity Office.

The Governor proposes an “early action” pandemic relief package when the Legislature returns in January with a focus on addressing the urgent needs of struggling businesses and rental assistance. There is also movement in the capital budget, designed to create our state’s version of a stimulus package.

While much of the discussion throughout the spring and summer months was focused on the bleak fiscal outlook for the state, the budget picture is brightening, although still tenuous and uncertain. Since our state’s revenue did not dip as much as expected, federal stimulus dollars

provided assistance and caseloads are down, generating some savings, the Governor's budget does not contain significant cuts.

It is important to note the Governor's budget is predicated upon passage of a mixture of new taxes and revenues (totaling \$1.3 billion) as well as tapping into the rainy day fund and cash reserves. By including these new investments, it allows him to propose new expenditures that would not be possible without this new revenue. Among other proposals, the Governor proposes a new capital gains tax as well as a "covered lives assessment" on health insurers, Medicaid managed care organizations, limited health service contractors and third-party administrators.

With the release of the Governor's budget, attention now turns to the Legislature where they will draft and ultimately pass a final budget for the Governor's approval.

### Proposed Early Learning Investments

\*Caveat to the information below. Analyzing budgets is like peeling an onion. You always find things you missed or get clarification that can shift your analysis. So, please take this as my first read.

Governor Inslee recognized the significant impact of Covid on child care with a number of investments and development of a [budget highlight](#) document on the issues.

Proposed key investments include:

**"Pandemic" Home Visiting (\$5.6 million).** One-time funding is provided to provide 530 families home visiting in 23 communities with high rates of child abuse and neglect investigations.

#### **Child Care**

- **PPE (\$2.2 million).** Support for child care providers to purchase PPE.
- **Health Care Coverage Sponsorship Pilot (\$27 million).** Create a four-year pilot for early learning providers in licensed child care centers to receive a \$100/month reduction in the premium for Qualified Health Plans through the Health Benefits Exchange after the individual's advance premium tax credit is applied. This pilot would impact about 10,000 workers.

#### **Working Connections Child Care**

- **Income Eligibility Increase (\$23.9 million).** Increase income eligibility by 10% from 200% of the federal poverty level to 210% to serve 4900 more children in Working Connections Child Care.
- **Working Connections Co-Payment Relief (\$39.7 million).** Temporary change the co-pay structure to reduce the co-payment by 50% for families between 144-200% of the federal poverty level. This would impact 8600 families.

- **Family Child Care Collective Bargaining Agreement (\$6.4 million).** The Collective Bargaining Agreement includes a 35 cent an hour increase for Family, Friends and Neighbors (\$4.41 million); a two percent increase for Tiered Reimbursement for providers at Early Achievers 3.5 (\$854,000); and a 17.6% increase for non-standard hours (\$1.1 million).

## ECEAP

- **ECEAP Slot Increase (\$9.6 million).** This funding would support 750 new slots in FY 2023, with 90% of the funding for full-day (6 hours) and 10% for extended-day (10 hours).
- **ECEAP Rate Increase (\$9.7 million).** Funding is provided for a 7% rate increase.
- **Facilities (\$4.7 million in bonds).** Capital funding is provided for facility construction and renovation grants to current and potential ECEAP providers.
- **ECEAP Entitlement (\$41.466 in savings).** In recognition that Covid impacted ECEAP enrollment, savings is assumed for not meeting the 2022-23 ECEAP entitlement. This is funding that was included in the four-year budget with the assumption that more slots would be added. Because these slots will not be included, it results in a savings.
- **ECEAP Entitlement and Integration (\$1 million).** Funding is provided to develop a roadmap to meet ECEAP entitlement, to identify capital investments to build classrooms and to workforce needs. Additionally, DCYF and OSPI is provided funding to complete a report on efforts to align high-quality preschool in our state.

**Early Learning Navigators (\$3.9 million).** Funding is provided for a new program designed to assist child welfare engaged families in 23 regions with high rates of child abuse and neglect investigations. These early learning navigators will assess need, match to available programs and help families enroll.

## Additional Community Investments

During this challenging time, we are seeing a number of philanthropic and companies step up to assist Washingtonians during this pandemic. Today, [Microsoft](#) announced a \$110 million investment for Covid-related economic and education recovery, that includes funding for local nonprofits and assistance in re-opening schools. Additionally, Washington-based Mackenzie Scott made a number of significant investments in [Washington state nonprofits](#) in the past days. (Editorial note – reading the responses of the surprised nonprofits who did not solicit these gifts is simply delightful). Finally, All In WA announced nearly [\\$3 million in grants](#) to child care providers, among other investments.

With our focus on state-level work, it is also important to acknowledge and recognize these corresponding investments contributing to our state's recovery.

## Trivia Answers...

According to “Weird Facts,” it is illegal in Washington state to:

- Walk about in public if he or she has the common cold.
- Paint polka dots on the American flag.
- Attach a vending machine to a utility pole without prior consent from the utility company. (Assuming this law came as a result of some prank?).

Locally, the following acts are illegal in these municipalities:

- In the City of Wilbur, one may not ride an ugly horse.
- In the City of Walla Walla, it is illegal to give noxious substances to a bird in any city park.
- And in the City of Spokane, it is illegal to kneel on a pedestrian skywalk.

Given the filters imposed for 2021, it is highly unlikely any “weird” laws will be added to this list as a result of 2021.