



LEGISLATURE MAKES PROGRESS ON PUBLIC SAFETY IN 2023,  
DELIVERS WINS FOR 35TH DISTRICT

REPRESENTING  
WASHINGTON'S 35TH  
LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT

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Dear Friends and Neighbors,

Your Legislature has finished its 2023 session at the Capitol in Olympia. We made progress on public safety, offered a course correction on housing, and delivered several big wins for the 35th Legislative District.

In this session report, we'll tell you about the big developments of the year. The three of us – **Sen. Drew MacEwen** and **Reps. Dan Griffey** and **Travis Couture** – worked as a team on everything from local public works projects to state sex-predator policy.

The biggest story on the local level was the defeat of the governor's plan to delay major road projects across the state. Construction of the Belfair Bypass would have been kicked into the 2030s. But the transportation budget we passed keeps the project on track, with construction soon to begin. Other wins include design work for a new Mason County Jail, and a better funding formula for rural domestic violence centers like Shelton's Turning Pointe.

There were signs of promise this year. Public safety was a top issue as Republicans worked with moderate Democrats to reverse disastrous laws passed two years ago on police pursuits and drugs. Unfortunately, we encountered partisan resistance so fierce that it forced us into a special session. The resulting legislation goes only partway.

In other areas, we saw our majority colleagues continue down the wrong track – more restrictions on Second Amendment rights, costly new land-use mandates, and the elimination of Washington's unique tax advisory votes. Our COVID crisis may be over, but our colleagues were no more willing to consider reining in the governor's emergency powers than they were a year ago. And while this year's \$70 billion budget avoids new taxes, tax proposals for next year are already on the table.

We hope you will stay in touch – we want to know what you're thinking about the direction of state government. If you have a problem with a state agency, we'd like to help. You can reach us through the contacts listed on this page. Our most important duty is to serve you.

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Leave a message for your lawmakers on the  
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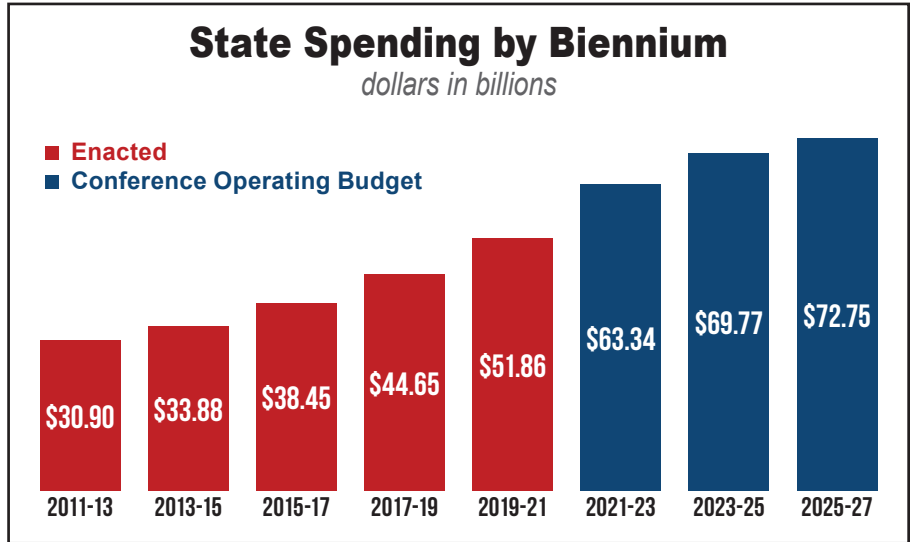
## \$70B BUDGET DOUBLES STATE SPENDING IN JUST 10 YEARS

This year’s Legislature passed a \$70 billion operating budget for 2023-25, which by Olympia standards was a model of restraint. Growth is about even with inflation, and it contains no new taxes.

Our votes on this budget were split – there were some positives, yet much we couldn’t support. While growth has slowed, the budget continues the massive run-up state spending over the past decade, doubling from \$33.8 billion in 2013-15. It provides no tax relief. And it fails to adequately address high-priority public concerns, like law enforcement funding, addressing the mental health crisis we all see, cleaning up homeless camps, increasing special education funding and dealing with student learning loss during COVID shutdowns.

While this budget contains no new taxes, it might be hard to tell. Big tax hikes approved by majority Democrats in previous sessions kicked in this year. These include the state’s new income tax on capital gains and a cap-and-trade program that already has boosted Washington gas prices about 45 cents a gallon. A new payroll tax for long-term care launches in July, with a maximum benefit that provides only about three months’ care. Proposals set for consideration next year include a wealth tax, an expansion of the state income tax, an increase in the real estate excise tax, and a plan to allow growth in property taxes to triple.

**No more advisory votes:** Our colleagues this year voted to junk Washington’s unique tax advisory votes (**SB 5082**), launched a decade ago by a citizen initiative. This eliminates what remaining voice the people have under current leadership when the Legislature raises taxes without asking voters.



### NEW PAYROLL TAX LAUNCHES IN JULY

Starting July 1, most Washington workers will see a new deduction on their paychecks – a payroll tax for a state-run long-term care insurance program. Approved by our colleagues four years ago, this program was supposed to begin last year, but it was put on hold so lawmakers could address significant problems that emerged. Unfortunately, many bugs remain. Among them: The meager maximum lifetime payout of just \$36,500 will cover only a few months in a nursing home. Move to another state, and you can’t take it with you.



We think the Legislature should have started over and worked with the private sector to develop a more robust program. A half-million Washington residents already have opted out by obtaining better policies offered by private insurers. This is no longer an option. Workers initially will pay 58 cents per \$100 of income, but this program could become more costly in the future if benefits are increased.

### SECOND AMENDMENT RIGHTS UNDER ATTACK

Three bills that sharply impair the right to keep and bear arms were passed by the Legislature this year and signed into law April 25. The legal challenges started a few minutes later, and the constitutional issues involved are significant. This year’s legislation includes:

- **A ban on high-capacity rifles – HB 1240** bars the sale and “import” of common modern sporting rifles with semiautomatic capabilities and magazine capacities of 10 rounds or more.
- **A new training requirement – HB 1143** requires firearms purchasers to pass a state-sanctioned gun training course, improperly placing a condition on a right guaranteed by state and federal constitutions. Classes meeting state requirements are not currently offered, curriculum rules are vague, and it is unclear how and where they will be taught, or at what cost.
- **Lawsuits from the attorney general – SB 5078** allows the attorney general to sue manufacturers and dealers when firearms are used in crime.

Whatever the courts determine, these laws won’t stop violence, and we’ll be back next year debating new restrictions on law-abiding gun owners. Emotional responses like these do not address fundamental causes – mental and behavioral issues – nor our collective responsibility to prevent violence before it occurs. We opposed these measures as a simplistic and ineffective answer to a complex problem rooted in human nature.

# 35TH LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT • 2023 SESSION UPDATE

## PUBLIC SAFETY IS SESSION'S TOP ISSUE

*Legislature partially restores police pursuits, passes drug law in special session*

Our biggest debates this year focused on public safety, as a rising crime rate and skyrocketing drug use forced lawmakers to rethink disastrous legislation passed two years ago. We predicted disorder in 2021 when our majority colleagues responded to urban unrest with laws to restrict police and decriminalize drugs. Results were worse than we expected.

The State Patrol tells us car theft is up 50 percent. Criminal getaways tripled due to a ban on most police pursuits. Overdose deaths doubled between 2020 and 2022, to 2,500 annually, and the Department of Health tells us drugs have become the leading cause of death for men under age 60. Republicans worked this session with moderate Democrats to restore enforceable laws, but we encountered significant resistance. Although this year's Legislature made progress, our work is far from over.



*Lawmakers were forced into special session May 16 when House Democrats balked at tougher penalties for hard drug possession and public use.*

## A HALFWAY SOLUTION ON POLICE PURSUITS



Washington's two-year-old pursuit ban has forced police to allow suspects flee crime scenes, by requiring "probable cause" rather than "reasonable suspicion" before officers can give chase. Tragedies have ensued because police have been unable to chase and detain suspects who went on to commit new crimes.

Unfortunately, many of our urban colleagues continue to believe effective law enforcement is the greater problem, and we were unable to fully restore police authority. The final compromise (**SB 5352**) allows pursuits when police have a reasonable suspicion a suspect is involved in a violent crime. But they remain off-limits for non-violent crimes like vehicle theft, reckless driving and burglary. Our votes on this half-solution were split, but we agree we're going to have to revisit this issue. Until we do, we can expect more tragedy and victimization.

## DRUG LAW PASSES IN OVERTIME SESSION



Tougher penalties for hard drugs like heroin and fentanyl proved such a tough sell that passage required a special legislative session. Two years ago, our state Supreme Court overturned our felony drug statutes on a technicality. Our colleagues took the opportunity to decriminalize the possession of hard drugs, downgrading the crime to a barely enforceable misdemeanor. The new law eliminated the threat of jail time for addicts and took away a powerful tool used by prosecutors and judges to

force the afflicted into treatment and keep order in the streets. Drug use predictably exploded – in homeless camps, our streets, even in our schools.

This year we were under pressure to pass a new bill, because this weak and unenforceable law was due to expire on June 30. The Senate favored a tougher approach, but House Democrats came up with a weaker solution that satisfied no one and failed on the House floor on the final day of the regular session.

To prevent what would have been a de facto legalization of hard drugs, lawmakers returned for a one-day special session May 16. The final compromise makes possession a gross misdemeanor, punishable on the first two offenses by up to six months of jail time. The new law restores tools to get addicts the help they need, the proper and compassionate response to a growing social crisis.

# SEN. MacEWEN • REP. GRIFFEY • REP. COUTURE



## SEN. MacEWEN

This was my first year in the Senate after 10 years in the House. Immediately I found myself playing a strategic role as lead Republican member on the Senate Environment, Energy and Telecommunications Committee. One of our biggest tasks is to oversee the rollout of new policies designed to promote green energy. As initiatives like cap and trade and low carbon fuel standards inevitably increase energy prices, we need to make sure these plans are carried out responsibly, without disrupting the economy and forcing huge costs onto people like you and me. Electricity supply also has become a concern. Sound decisions today will help assure a better future.

Putting rural domestic violence shelters on a sound financial footing has long been a concern for me. Shelters are funded based on county population, belying the fact that many victims flee urban areas and seek refuge at shelters like Shelton's Turning Pointe Survivor Advocacy Center. This year and last, I was able to obtain additional funding for rural shelters based on bed capacity. For a more permanent solution, this year I passed **SB 5398**, creating a task force within the Department of Social and Health Services to create a new shelter funding formula.

Other bills I passed this year make changes to veterans' programs at the request of the Department of Veterans Affairs (**SB 5323**), allow restaurants to continue serving "cocktails-to-go" (**SB 5448**), and clarify public participation and advance notice requirements when special-purpose boards and commissions fill vacancies (**SB 5437**).



## REP. GRIFFEY

I was proud to serve as House Republican Whip in the 2023 session. In this leadership role, I help manage floor action and count votes among House Republicans. I also continue to serve as the assistant ranking member on the Community Safety, Justice,

and Reentry Committee, which considers bills related to public safety — drug laws, vehicular pursuits and more.

This year I was honored to be the lead Republican sponsor of a bipartisan bill addressing our state's dramatic increase in drug-overdose deaths. **HB 1209**, the Tyler Lee Yates Act, bans the private use of pill presses, frequently used in garage operations to mimic prescription oxycodone and other controlled substances. These pills, often laced with fentanyl, can kill in a single dose. This bill is named for a friend's son, who struggled with addiction after suffering severe back injuries in a motorcycle crash, and who died after taking a single fake Percocet. Other bills I sponsored and passed this session are:

**HB 1766** — Creating the state Hope Card program, giving survivors of domestic violence and other abuse a convenient way to provide proof they have obtained a restraining order. The Hope Card is a laminated wallet-sized card that contains all pertinent information, allowing courts to make updates and eliminating the need for victims to keep legal documents handy at all times.

**HB 1369** — Increasing security staffing by allowing Fish and Wildlife officers to take off-duty work for sporting events, concerts and other purposes. This gives them the same flexibility as Washington State Patrol officers, who go through the same law enforcement training and already are permitted to work off-duty assignments.



## REP. COUTURE

It has been an honor and a privilege to serve you and to be your voice in the state House of Representatives. I am proud to serve as the assistant ranking Republican on the House Human Services, Youth, and Early Learning Committee, and to have been recently

elevated to assistant ranking member on the House Appropriations Committee. I hit the ground running my freshman year by leading many efforts, including fighting the state's placement of sexually violent predators in our district.

While the session was a disappointment regarding statewide policy, my seatmates and I worked as a team to accomplish great things for the 35th District, including historic investments into our rural areas that will lift up the communities we represent.

I promised when I went to Olympia I would fight for rural communities, public safety, quality education, a vibrant economy, and your constitutional rights. I kept those promises by fighting for measures to better fund law enforcement, clean up homeless encampments, protect parental rights, and by supporting bipartisan and responsible budgets.

As a dad of kids with special needs, I also focused on increasing investments in special education (**HB 1436**), reducing the cost of childcare (**HB 1537**), and protecting the most vulnerable members of our society (**HB 1274**). The latter bill was my first to be signed into law. It's aimed at preventing child abuse and malnutrition for children under supervision of Child Protective Services (CPS) and was passed in honor of Karreon Franks after his tragic death.

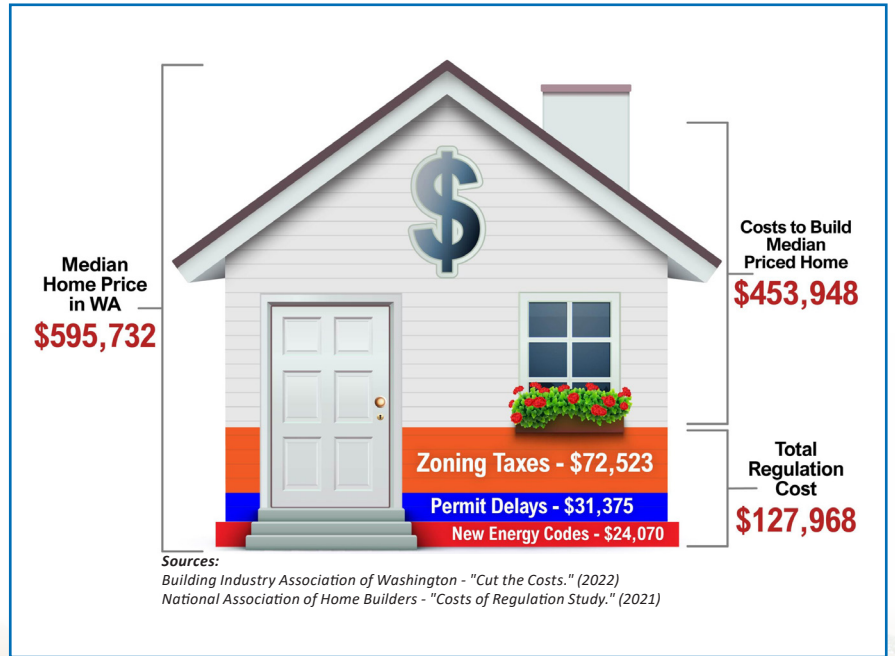
## AFFORDABLE HOUSING PROVES A BIPARTISAN CAUSE

One bright spot for bipartisanship this year came on affordable housing. We saw passage of more than 20 pieces of legislation, from members of both parties. Just as important was the underlying recognition contained in these bills, that government has played a significant role in increasing the cost of housing. Prompting concern is a Department of Commerce estimate that Washington will need 1.1 million new homes over the next 20 years — we're not even close to meeting demand.

We voted for bills that cut permit fees when local permits are unreasonably delayed (**SB 5290**), make it easier to develop accessory dwelling units (**HB 1337**), and reduce restrictions on high-density housing (**HB 1110**). Other measures passed this year ease the impact of state land-use planning laws on smaller cities.

This concern for affordable housing is a promising development, and we look forward to more legislation on this subject in the future. Unfortunately, while we were passing laws to reduce burdens, our colleagues also were proposing legislation to increase them.

A new law this year (**HB 1181**) requires state land-use planning to incorporate costly climate change mandates. Bills also were introduced this year to increase real estate excise taxes and allow more rapid growth in property taxes. These bills did not advance, but remain alive for consideration in the 2024 legislative session.



State and local regulation adds nearly \$128,000 to the cost of a typical new home.



## TENINO PROPOSAL PUTS SPOTLIGHT ON STATE SEX PREDATOR POLICY

A proposal from a private developer for an adult group home for sex predators sent the Tenino area into an uproar last January. Five of the state's most incorrigible sex criminals were to be housed in a lightly patrolled rural area, alongside a lake frequented by children. What could possibly go wrong?

Thurston County zoning officials headed it off, days before it was to open, but the incident calls attention to a poorly-considered state plan to move sex predators from a secure facility on McNeil Island to low-security group homes across the state. To prevent other nasty surprises, we sponsored bills to require significant advance notice to communities, law enforcement and local officials (**SB 5544/HB 1734**), and to postpone new placements while a task force reconsiders the policy (**HB 1813**). These bills did not receive consideration, but a public notice requirement made it into the budget — only to be vetoed by Gov. Jay Inslee as "burdensome." As other communities find themselves in the same position, we expect greater pressure for the Legislature to deal with this issue in future sessions. Your 35th District lawmakers are currently working on a bill for the 2024 session.

# 35TH LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT • 2023 SESSION UPDATE

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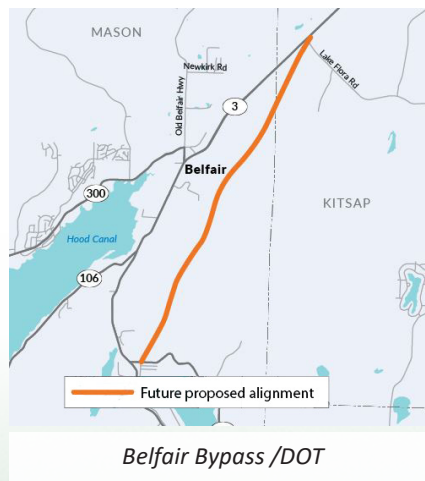
## BELFAIR BYPASS AND LOCAL PROJECTS ARE FUNDED BY LEGISLATURE

Final budgets adopted by Washington lawmakers keep the Belfair Bypass on track and finance \$36 million in public works projects across Mason, Thurston and Kitsap counties.

Lawmakers rejected a proposal from Gov. Jay Inslee to delay major road projects statewide, pushing construction of the Belfair Bypass into the 2030s. The new transportation budget (**HB 1125**) allows the \$79 million project to begin on schedule and adds \$12 million to stave off inflation and supply-chain disruptions.

Meanwhile, 35th District lawmakers worked together on the capital budget (**SB 5200**) to fund critical local projects. This year's list includes:

- \$3 million for repairs to water tank storage at the Washington Corrections Center near Shelton;
- \$1.85 million for Angleside reservoir capacity upgrades in Shelton;
- \$1.2 million for young adult transitional housing in Shelton;
- \$1.03 million for Mason County jail design work in Shelton;
- \$1.6 million for Mason Public Utility District water projects in Matlock and Union;
- \$618,000 for Camp Thunderbird wastewater treatment facility in Olympia;
- \$571,000 for replacement of the water system at Millersylvania State Park,



- \$515,000 for Port of Allyn public pier repair in Allyn;
- \$412,000 for Kitsap Humane Society Veterinary Lifesaving Center in Silverdale;

- \$350,000 for Sandhill Park;
- \$350,000 for Yelm Highway Community Park;
- \$250,000 for regional water and sewer upgrades in Rochester;
- \$250,000 for security and access improvements in Shelton;
- \$215,000 for Shelton daycare and building project;
- \$198,000 for Swede Hall renovation in Rochester;
- \$103,000 for emergency shelter capital improvements in Shelton; and
- \$70,000 for library improvements in Shelton.