

Legislative Priorities

Counties are responsible for providing essential services to every resident in the State of Washington. Yet, in a time of economic prosperity and population growth, counties are faced with budget shortfalls that are leaving critical investments in criminal justice, public health, and infrastructure at risk. Enacting the Washington State Association of Counties' 2019 legislative priorities will provide needed relief to county budgets and invest in the services counties provide to all Washingtonians.

“Given the existing low level of state funding and the increased costs identified to date, the State should increase the funding levels to cities and counties for public defense.”

– House Judiciary Workgroup on Misdemeanor Public Defense Costs in Washington State, 2014



Funding for Trial Court Public Defense

Access to a defense attorney in criminal matters is a fundamental constitutional right that the Legislature passed on to counties. Yet, the state funds less than 4% of the cost for these services. Counties currently spend approximately \$155 million annually with the state providing only \$6 million.

For equal access to justice, the Legislature must fund the full cost of trial court public defense services.



Fish Passage Barrier Removal

Counties support legislation that will provide adequate funding to remove fish barriers for all jurisdictions across the state, including a long-term commitment to remove priority fish barriers - not just respond to the state's obligations under the culverts decision.

The Legislature must provide funding to remove fish barriers at the state and local level as well as the necessary tools to meet the 2030 mandate.



Foundational Public Health Services

Providing public health services is a shared state and local responsibility. Some public health services are so critical that they must be provided to every resident. Other public health needs may be unique to certain regions of our state, so each community determines and implements local priorities. The Foundational Public Health Services (FPHS) model ensures all residents can depend on a core set of services that only governmental public health can provide.

Support Foundational Public Health Services funding for local health jurisdictions to ensure that the system can respond to public health threats.



Oppose New Unfunded Mandates

The Legislature has continued to shift costs through policy changes without addressing the underlying funding problems that face county budgets. Counties have been diverting funds from road maintenance, reducing investments in infrastructure, and leaving critical public safety positions unfilled to meet the obligations the state keeps piling on.

Counties oppose any legislation that will increase costs for local government without funding provided by the state.

