



# 2022-23 **Annual Report**



# Who We Are

## The Voice of Washington Counties

Created in 1906, the Washington State Association of Counties (WSAC) serves the counties of Washington State. Members include elected county commissioners, councilmembers, and executives from all of Washington's 39 counties. WSAC provides a variety of services to its member counties, including advocacy, professional development, public-private business partnerships, and a forum to network and share best practices.

While voting within the organization is limited to county commissioners, council members, and county executives, WSAC also serves as an umbrella organization for affiliate organizations representing:

- County Road Engineers
- Local Public Health Officials
- County Administrators
- Solid Waste Managers
- County Human Service Administrators
- IT Directors
- Planning Directors
- Clerks of County Boards

WSAC also works closely with its sister organization, the Washington Association of County Officials (WACO), which serves independently elected non-judicial county officials, including assessors, auditors, treasurers, prosecutors, coroners, clerks, and sheriffs.

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# Letter from President Kuney

It has truly been my privilege to serve as your WSAC President this year.

As I reflect on 2023, I think back on how our counties have benefited from the shared discussion that will carry WSAC forward through some big changes in 2024 and beyond. One of those major changes will be the retirement of our Executive Director, Eric Johnson.

Over his amazing career, Eric has lobbied tirelessly for our collective needs, provided excellent guidance to the WSAC staff, while strengthening WSAC's influence. Eric is a true leader, both within our organization and in the community. He listens to our members, peers, and his team with a calm and steady patience. Eric sees the potential in others, whether members or staff, and has helped develop that for many years.

Thank you, Eric, for taking WSAC to the next level through your passionate belief in each of our counties' strengths. We wish you and Julie all the best in retirement. You will be missed, and I will always be grateful for our

time together, whether spent working on the issues or as friends.

I also want to thank those commissioners whom I've had the privilege to serve with on the WSAC Board who have fostered my growth as a leader. In particular, Rob Gelder and Jamie Stephens have shown me how to be thoughtful and present in some challenging discussions, while Michael Largent taught me to not take myself too seriously.

Looking forward, I am excited to have Lisa Janicki from Skagit County take the helm as our next President and Rob Coffman of Lincoln County as 1st Vice President. They will do a great job leading us through the executive director transition.

I believe in the power of WSAC, and the influence we, as elected officials, have in Olympia to benefit all counties.

Thank you to all of our members who have stepped up to provide leadership on our Board of Directors and our Legislative Steering Committee. I know that we, the 39 counties of Washington, are stronger together.

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A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mary Z. Kuney".

**Mary Kuney**  
WSAC President





# Letter from Executive Director Eric Johnson

I am excited to present to you the 2023 Washington State Association of Counties' Annual Report -- containing highlights of our legislative successes, programs delivered, partnerships created and improved, services provided, members engaged, conferences and trainings offered, financial summary, and so much more.

2023 presented opportunities and challenges for the Association as it prepares for leadership transition and works to assure all counties are active and engaged members. The Association is fortunate to have a remarkable staff, dedicated Executive Committee members, and effective committee leadership. I am personally and professionally grateful to serve and work with so many incredible elected and appointed county officials, partner organizations, and dedicated individuals who endeavor to improve public policy, increase integrity and accountability in public service, and build trust and confidence in our county governments here in Washington State.

The ongoing and future success of WSAC is having active and engaged members willing to invest time and resources in the organization. A membership that fully understands there is a collective benefit that their county and all counties in Washington

State are better off from their participation.

As I have said many, many times, I believe deeply in county government. We are blessed to have a system that permits us to elect our fellow citizens to self-govern, administer, and lead our counties. For me, counties remain the heart of our representative democracy. I have deep respect for those of you willing to step forward to serve your community. I so appreciate those of you who do so with respect for the institution and recognize the tremendous responsibility that comes with being an elected and appointed county official.

Since 1906, our 39 counties have had the privilege to be a member of the Washington State Association of Counties and fully receive the organizational benefits, services, and program offerings. It's quite remarkable to have been in existence for 117 years. I am honored to have had the chance to be a small part of WSAC's rich history and legacy.

With a deep sense of gratitude, I thank you for the opportunity to serve as WSAC Executive Director.

**Eric Johnson**, WSAC Executive Director





# Litigation

In 2018, the WSAC Membership established the Strategic Litigation, Advocacy, and Communication (SLAC) Program designed to use legal actions as an effective tool to advance the WSAC policy agenda in coordination with legislative advocacy strategies and actions. WSAC's legal actions are used sparingly and as a last resort.

## Blake Decision

On October 3, 2021, WSAC formally joined 21 counties as a co-plaintiff against the State to establish that the State is solely responsible for all costs associated with implementing the Blake decision, including the cost of vacations, re-sentencings, and all Legal Financial Obligation (LFO) refunds. The desired outcome is a declaration from the court that the State is required to indemnify counties for all Blake expenses, including all LFO refunds and the administrative costs to implement this Washington State Supreme Court decision (judicial, clerk, prosecutor, public defense, administration, and operations), that counties will incur in implementing the Blake decision. Negotiations are occurring with the Attorney General's Office and legislation was passed for the Administrative Office of the Courts to create a process to directly reimburse individuals who paid LFOs as a result of a Blake conviction.

## Indigent Defense

The WSAC Board of Directors voted unanimously during their May 5, 2021, regular meeting to concur with the findings provided by the WSAC Legal Committee and Legislative Steering Committee that there are merits and reasonable grounds to support a legal challenge to require the State to fully fund constitutionally required trial court indigent defense services and authorized a legal challenge. WSAC filed this complaint on August 8, 2023. Yakima, Lincoln, and Pacific Counties have joined as co-plaintiffs.

## Amicus Briefs

Amicus Curiae Briefs are a means to provide information to the court on a particular aspect of the case or point of law in an attempt to help the court make a determination on the matter. Over the past several years, WSAC has worked with independent counsel and county prosecuting attorneys to submit briefs on issues important to county government including:

## Trueblood Contempt Sanctions

The WSAC Board of Directors voted during its May 10, 2023, regular meeting to file an amicus curie brief in State of Washington, et. al., Respondents, vs. DSHS, COA No. 57573-6-II. The issue is whether counties can seek compensatory contempt sanctions against the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) when DSHS fails to timely transport Trueblood class members from jail, for admission at a state hospital for competency restoration, leaving counties to cover the costs of incarceration until the class members are transported. There is also a question as to whether a county may intervene in an underlying matter in order to pursue contempt sanctions against DSHS. The State's opening brief is due October 3, 2023, the Respondent's brief is due November 2, 2023, and our amicus brief is due December 17, 2023.

## Civil Conversion

WSAC and, initially, 22 counties filed suit against DSHS in Pierce County Superior Court in August 2023. The intent of the lawsuit is to hold the State accountable to fulfill its obligation to evaluate and treat patients with behavioral health conditions. DSHS contends that it is no longer obligated to evaluate or treat people who have had their felony charges dismissed, despite superior court orders directing DSHS to evaluate these individuals, because of its interpretation of a federal court order. Therefore, these individuals are potentially being released back into the community without facing justice and without receiving treatment ordered by the court. Rather, these individuals are referred back to their home counties to designated crisis responders, placing the burden of care on counties despite the State's responsibility. Furthermore, DSHS has also indicated that it intends to forego the State required 30 day notification of victims, law enforcement, prosecutors, etc. of its intent to release these individuals. A motion for a preliminary injunction was denied and the case will be heard in federal court on September 22, 2023.

- Personnel and Labor
- Public Works Liability
- Law Enforcement and Public Safety
- Public Health
- Corrections, Jails and Medical Costs
- Land Use and Zoning
- Taxation, Fees and Charges
- Public Records
- Franchise Agreements
- Juror Pay
- Public Health Responsibilities
- Trial Court Indigent Defense
- County Charter
- Constitutional and Administrative Authorities for County Elected Officials

# Member Engagement



**100%**

of counties are  
members of  
WSAC and NACo



**4**

presidential leadership  
appointments to NACo  
committees, caucuses,  
and task forces



**29**

## WSAC Member Meetings

- 6 Board Meetings
- 14 Legislative Steering Committee Meetings
- 6 Federal Priorities Committee Meetings
- 22 Congressional Delegation Meetings
- 59 Virtual Assemblies



**100%**

of counties were  
represented  
at the 2022  
County Leaders  
Conference



# Communications & Member Services

The Communications and Member Services division is responsible for strategic communications, education, networking, member services, and events.

## 2022 Key Accomplishments

- **Wander Counties Campaign**  
Created multi-year marketing campaign for #WanderCounties. Utilize digital channels to engage WSAC members and affiliates in sharing their pride in their counties and highlighting the critical work they do.
- **Business Partners Program**  
Re-launched WSAC Business Partners Program in partnership with affiliates to build greater awareness and increase benefits for member counties.
- **County Institute Courses**  
Finalized the first round of training and education videos for the County Development Institute of WA. Developed specialized add-on trainings to enhance the learning portfolio.



**Facebook**

2,900 page likes (2.5% increase from '21)



**X (Twitter)**

2,020 followers (3.5% increase from '21)



**LinkedIn**

741 followers



**Instagram**

682 followers



**Meetings**

59 Virtual  
Assemblies

17+ Hybrid  
Meetings



**Website**

216,452  
page views

192,222  
website visitors

# Advocacy

**LSC members  
met bi-weekly in Olympia**



**During the 2023  
legislative session 2,312  
bills were introduced;**



**491**

**passed the  
legislature**



**20**

**were vetoed  
in whole (2)  
or in part  
(18) by the  
governor**



**105**

**Day  
legislative  
session**

# Legislative Affairs

The 2023 legislative session was the first year of a new biennium or two-year legislative cycle. The first year is also a “long” session, lasting 105 days. Along with considering proposals for new laws, the House and Senate must also pass new biennial state budgets, including Operating, Capital, and Transportation. 2,312 bills were introduced, and 491 were passed – a significant increase in bills passed in one year from recent sessions. Legislators were back in person this session after two consecutive “virtual sessions” during the pandemic.

## 2023 Bill Outcomes & Budget

### GENERAL GOVERNMENT



#### Tort Liability & Risk Management

**HB 1025** would have applied vicarious liability to local agencies for police misconduct.

WSAC Position: **OPPOSE** Outcome: **FAILED**

**HB 1649/SB 5059** would have applied prejudgment interest to tort judgments.

WSAC Position: **OPPOSE** Outcome: **FAILED**



#### Public Records

**HB 1597/SB 5571** would have protected local governments from liability associated with frivolous records requests.

WSAC Position: **SUPPORT** Outcome: **FAILED**



#### Taxes

**HB 1628** would have authorized an additional .25 percent real estate excise tax for local governments. At least half of the proceeds would have to be dedicated to affordable housing projects.

WSAC Position: **NEUTRAL** Outcome: **FAILED**

**HB 1670/SB 5618/SB 5770** would have lifted the property tax limit factor for local governments from 1% annually to up to 3%.

WSAC Position: **SUPPORT** Outcome: **FAILED**

**HB 1756** creates a new exemption from property taxes for personal property used to generate renewable energy. The property tax is replaced with a production excise tax and 42.5% of the excise tax goes to the county.

WSAC Position: **SUPPORT** Outcome: **PASSED**



#### Budget Highlights

**\$16 million** for election security, including in county election offices.

**\$74 million** for grants to increase solar deployment and installation of battery storage in public buildings.

**\$99 million** in liquor profits for local governments.

**\$89 million** in liquor taxes for local governments.

**\$50 million** in cannabis excise taxes for local governments.

**\$138 million** for the development of community electric vehicle charging infrastructure.



## TRANSPORTATION & INFRASTRUCTURE



### Transportation

**HB 1832** would have directed the Department of Licensing to establish a voluntary Road Usage Charge (RUC) program by July 1, 2025, for light-duty vehicles. The bill also would have set a target date for implementing a mandatory RUC program by January 1, 2030.

WSACE Position: **OTHER** Outcome: **FAILED**

**HB 1084** will significantly change the purpose of the Freight Mobility and Strategic Investment Board by changing it from a granting agency to providing strategic guidance to the Governor and the Legislature regarding the highest priority freight mobility needs in the state.

WSACE Position: **SUPPORT** Outcome: **PASSED**



### Infrastructure

**SJR 8201/SB 5303** Joint Resolution 8201, if approved and ratified by the voters, would have amended the state Constitution to establish a new Public Works Revolving Trust Account where the repayments of Public Works Board loans would be deposited and only used for new loans and grants.

WSACE Position: **SUPPORT** Outcome: **FAILED**

**HB 1329** will prohibit utilities from involuntarily terminating water or electric service to any residential user during certain high-temperature events and require that utilities make a reasonable attempt upon request to reconnect service during certain high-temperature events.

WSACE Position: **NEUTRAL** Outcome: **PASSED**

**HB 1705** would have required a county that plans to extend or improve a stormwater control facility within an operating diking or drainage district to notify and consult with the district. It also allowed a written agreement for the district to operate a stormwater control facility constructed by the county and with such an agreement the district could receive a portion of the stormwater rates and service charges collected by the county.

WSACE Position: **OPPOSE** Outcome: **FAILED**



### Budget Highlights

**\$400 million** appropriation to the Public Works Assistance Account.

**\$287 million** for the Transportation Improvement Board.

**\$105 million** for the County Road Administration Board.

**\$50 million** appropriation to the State Broadband Office for federal match requirements.

**\$48.4 million** appropriation for the Brian Abbott Fish Barrier Removal Board.

**\$4 million** for the Rural Lane Departures.

**\$500,000** for the Transportation Commission to conduct a route jurisdiction study to assess the current state highway inventory and local roadway designations to determine if changes are needed in jurisdictional assignment.

**\$300,000** for the Municipal Research and Services Center to convene a work group to develop a process to allow the Washington State Department of Transportation to partner with a local jurisdiction to allow the jurisdiction to be lead on improvement or preservation projects on state highways.



## Public Works Procurement

**SB 5268** significantly changes the Small Works Roster process to reduce barriers for small businesses by allowing, among other things, jurisdictions to directly contract with certified small businesses for projects under \$150,000.

WSACE Position: **SUPPORT** Outcome: **PASSED**

**HB 1099/SB 5726** would have required that wages in public works contracts be paid at the prevailing wage in effect when the work is performed.

WSACE Position: **CONCERNS** Outcome: **FAILED**

**HB 1050** will expand apprenticeship utilization requirements for contractors bidding on certain municipal contracts.

WSACE Position: **NEUTRAL** Outcome: **PASSED**

**SB 5418** would have expanded the definition of public work bringing many contracted or purchased services under the new definition while also limiting “ordinary maintenance” to just work done by employees of the county.

WSACE Position: **OPPOSE** Outcome: **FAILED**



## NATURAL RESOURCES, ENVIRONMENT, & LAND USE



### Forest Management

**HB 1789** would have authorized DNR to enter into contracts for ecosystem services projects on state trust lands for afforestation, reforestation, and “blue carbon” projects on aquatic lands.

WSAC Position: **SUPPORT** Outcome: **FAILED**

**HB 1460** implements the recommendations of the trust land transfer working group and WSAC’s encumbered lands proviso implementation work group.

WSAC Position: **SUPPORT** Outcome: **PASSED**



### Growth Management

**HB 1181** added new requirements to local comprehensive plans under the state’s Growth Management Act for addressing the causes and impacts of climate change. The bill also includes new requirements for addressing environmental justice and equity concerns in local planning.

WSAC Position: **NEUTRAL** Outcome: **PASSED**

**HB 1216** creates a new, fully coordinated permitting process for clean energy projects that don’t seek siting authority through the Energy Facility Siting Evaluation Council. While counties are compelled to participate, local land use, zoning, and development regulation authority is upheld.

WSAC Position: **CONCERNS** Outcome: **PASSED**

**HB 1723/SB 5651** would have added another new goal and mandatory element to local government comprehensive plans under the GMA for addressing environmental justice and equity.

WSAC Position: **OPPOSE** Outcome: **FAILED**



### Solid Waste Management

**HB 1131/SB 5154** proposed creating a new statewide extended producer responsibility program for product packaging and paper products. It would have radically changed most recycling programs statewide by removing local government responsibility for managing them.

WSAC Position: **CONCERNS** Outcome: **FAILED**



### Water Resources

**SB 5517** proposed implementing some of the recommendations of the joint legislative task force on water resource mitigation. It included proposals to overturn key findings in the Washington State Supreme Court “Foster” opinion.

WSAC Position: **SUPPORT** Outcome: **FAILED**







## Housing

**SB 5290** creates some new incentive programs for local governments to streamline and improve permitting processes. It also implements new timeline requirements for permit processing, including penalties for missing deadlines and new reporting requirements.

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WSAC Position: **SUPPORT** Outcome: **PASSED**

**HB 1337** includes new state-mandated requirements for allowing accessory dwelling units on residential lots.

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WSAC Position: **OPPOSE** Outcome: **PASSED**



## Budget Highlights

**\$20 million** for local comprehensive planning.

**\$41 million** for implementing HB 1181.

**\$83 million** for preserving and replacing older forests, replacing encumbered state forestlands, and silviculture activities on trust lands.

**\$14 million** for reappropriation of the water banking pilot grant program.

**\$24 million** for grants for local solid waste programs.

**\$6 million** for local government housing planning grants.

**\$3.5 million** for local government permitting grants.

**\$10 million** for local government grants supporting the siting of clean energy projects.



## PUBLIC HEALTH



### Statewide Medical Reserve Corps

**HB 1542** will establish a statewide medical reserve corps (MRC) to coordinate any significant, statewide public health emergency response with the local health officer. A statewide MRC will fill gaps across the state for counties without a local corps and be nimble to respond to concurrent emergencies and threats. There will also be coordination with local health officials to fill local and large-scale support efforts.

WSAC Position: **SUPPORT** Outcome: **PASSED**



### Social Enterprise & Food Safety

**HB 1706** would have established a separate program to regulate and permit home kitchen operations, including exempting several food safety measures that other food establishments must implement.

WSAC Position: **OPPOSE** Outcome: **FAILED**

**HB 1500** extends the cap on annual gross sales for low-risk cottage food operations and extends permit renewal requirements to every two years.

WSAC Position: **SUPPORT** Outcome: **PASSED**



### Opioid Response

Opioid Education in schools: **HB 1230** requires schools and the Department of Health to develop and post information on websites about substance use, trends, overdose symptoms, and other prevention strategies.

WSAC Position: **NONE** Outcome: **PASSED**

Accessing substance use disorder (SUD) treatment: **SB 5502** will require offenders to undergo a comprehensive SUD assessment before starting the Graduated Reentry Program at the Department of Corrections. DOC will be required to enroll offenders into the appropriate SUD treatment, medication-assisted treatment, and counseling programs.

WSAC Position: **NONE** Outcome: **PASSED**

**SB 5022** would have exempted fentanyl test strips from the definitions of drug paraphernalia.

WSAC Position: **SUPPORT** Outcome: **FAILED**



### Budget Highlights

**\$324 million** in Foundational Public Health Services;  
**\$100 million** of additional, new funding.

#### PREVENTION AND CHRONIC DISEASE INVESTMENTS:

Local home visiting programs were expanded by **\$9.5 million** to include additional families.

**\$5 million** in tobacco prevention, including youth education on vapor products.

**\$6 million** to continue WIC Program expansion, including local farmers market vouchers.

#### EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND READINESS:

**\$300,000** was included to fund local government grants for the costs of responding to certain weather events. The corresponding bill, HB 1010, failed to pass.

**\$14.4 million** was provided to support a statewide stockpile of PPE for public health and healthcare emergency response.

## PUBLIC SAFETY & HUMAN SERVICES



### Public Safety

**SB 5536** would have made simple possession of a controlled or counterfeit substance or use in a public place a gross misdemeanor. It would have also made the knowing possession of a legend drug, or use in a public place, a misdemeanor while preempting local governments from enacting drug paraphernalia laws. Pretrial diversion opportunities would also have been established as options for alternatives to detention for persons charged with these offenses.

WSAC Position: **NEUTRAL** Outcome: **PASSED**

**HB 1492** would have expanded the scope of the Blake decision by including cases that went back to 1951 rather than 1971 and increasing the types of legal financial obligations (LFOs) that qualify for reimbursement.

WSAC Position: **OPPOSE** Outcome: **FAILED**



### The Blake Issue

The legislature adjourned the 2023 legislative session without finding a compromise solution for a Blake fix. As a reminder, the State Supreme Court's 2021 Blake decision found the State's simple drug possession law unconstitutional. The legislature put in place a two-year solution that was set to expire on June 30th of this year. Thus, on June 30th, there would have been no state statute criminalizing the possession of controlled substances.

To address this issue, the Governor called a special legislative session that began on May 16th, the primary goal of which was to approve a statewide solution for drug possession in order to avoid a patchwork of ordinances imposed by individual cities and counties. Ultimately, the legislature passed SB 5536 with bipartisan support. The bill does a multitude of things. It establishes a gross misdemeanor for (1) knowing possession, and (2) knowing use

of counterfeit and controlled substances. It maintains that possession of legend drugs, like prescription medications, are misdemeanors. Penalties are limited for an individual's first two convictions to 180 days in jail and a \$1,000 fine. However, once an individual obtains a third conviction, they may be sentenced for up to 364 days in jail. The bill also establishes pretrial diversion programs that use recovery navigators, arrest and jail alternatives, or law enforcement assisted diversion (LEAD). If an individual completes six months of substantial compliance with treatment, the court must vacate their conviction. The bill preempts local governments from adopting or enforcing drug paraphernalia ordinances, except that local governments retain the ability to enact laws and ordinances related to the establishment and regulation of harm reduction services. It also includes in the definition of essential public facilities opioid use disorder treatment facilities, including mobile and fixed-site locations, recovery residences, and harm reduction programs (excluding safe injection sites).

PUBLIC SAFETY & HUMAN SERVICES CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE →



## PUBLIC SAFETY & HUMAN SERVICES (CONTINUED)



### Human Services

**SB 5386** reduces administrative complexity for county auditors and others by increasing the transparency of revenue flows for activities funded by document recording fees.

WSAC Position: **SUPPORT** Outcome: **PASSED**

**SB 5440** addresses the provision of timely competency evaluations and restoration services to those with behavioral health disorders. It requires the court to determine if there is genuine doubt as to competency before ordering a competency evaluation. Forensic navigators must assess individuals referred for competency evaluation for appropriateness for assisted outpatient treatment. Jails must allow access by clinical intervention specialists to provide direct services and consultation for defendants waiting for competency to stand trial. Medications provided in jails cannot be substituted.

WSAC Position: **NEUTRAL** Outcome: **PASSED**

**SB 5604** allows local governments to expand the use of existing chemical dependency, mental health treatment programs, and affordable and supportive housing sales and use tax revenues. It also allows local governments currently imposing these taxes to retain up to 10 percent of the annual revenue from the tax for administration costs.

WSAC Position: **SUPPORT** Outcome: **PASSED**

**SB 5358** requires the Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs to provide grants to counties to develop or expand veterans' service officers (VSO) programs, peer-to-peer support programs, and other services and programs to assist veterans in areas where such programs and services are needed. Counties with smaller populations and below the national average in the percentage of veterans receiving federal disability or pension compensation are prioritized for funding.

WSAC Position: **SUPPORT** Outcome: **PASSED**



### Budget Highlights

**\$2.4 million** over the biennium for VSOs through SSB 5358.

**\$38 million** to assist counties with the costs of Blake compliance for resentencing, vacations, certifying LFO refunds, and collection costs. A portion of HB 1492, expanding qualifying LFOs, was included as a proviso. This will ultimately cost counties money, but it is unclear what the exact impact will be.

**\$453,000** for the Jail and Juvenile Facilities Study and Modernization Task Force.

**\$18 million** over the biennium for grants to local governments to maintain programs and investments that are primarily funded through Document Recording Fees.

**\$390 million** for the construction of affordable housing, transitional housing, and shelter units.

**\$248 million** for case management, rental assistance, and other operating costs for programs serving individuals experiencing homelessness.



# 2023 Legislative Priorities



## Behavioral Health System Improvements – Network Adequacy

### Issue

Current behavioral health (BH) network adequacy standards are lacking in Washington. In fact, network adequacy standards are virtually non-existent. This results in gaps in access to critical services for Medicaid clients. Clients face difficulties getting into treatment, long wait times, and are unable to get the care they need.

### Legislative Ask

The State/Health Care Authority (HCA) shall establish, measure, and enforce BH network adequacy standards.

### Outcome

The Legislature passed E2SHB 1515, which requires the HCA to do a number of things including, but not limited to, seeking approval to amend the State Medicaid Plan to support direct payments to agencies to help with 24/7 crisis system capacity and to adopt network adequacy standards and an annual network adequacy review process for Managed Care Organization (MCO) BH provider networks within the Medicaid program. This was a great win for counties and our communities. It will ensure that people have access to a network of providers sufficient in numbers and types to make services available to all clients without unreasonable delay.



## Federal Transportation Fund Exchange

### Issue

Federal funding is vital to the success of county transportation programs. However, federal funds often have added requirements, resulting in heftier price tags and longer timelines for local projects. Federal funding also often requires a local match and is provided on a reimbursable basis, which can cause cashflow problems, especially for smaller jurisdictions.

### Legislative Ask

Allow counties to swap their sub-allocation of federal Surface Transportation Block Grant funds for state transportation dollars. An exchange like this would allow counties to deliver projects with state, rather than federal, resources, thereby rendering projects subject to applicable state and local, not federal, requirements.

### Outcome

The 2023-25 Transportation Budget establishes a \$25 million Federal Fund Exchange Pilot Program. The exchange rate for the swap is a \$.95 to \$1.00 ratio and the language requires a report on the program by December 2024.





## Modernizing Justice to Support and Promote Recovery

### Issue

Counties face many obstacles in successfully operating, maintaining, and providing services, like physical and behavioral health (BH), in their jails. Due to state hospital backlogs, individuals with BH needs are spending weeks and months in county jails. Most county jails were constructed in the 1980s, with several built in the early 1900s. Aging facilities have led to years of failing systems and patchwork fixes. These factors and others have created issues with adequate capacity, proper staffing, and poorly designed facilities for providing modern treatment needs.

### Legislative Ask

The legislature should commission the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) to gather and assess foundational information about jails and report on its findings. The information should include changes in jail populations and the current state and costs of jail facilities. In addition, the legislature should commission the Ruckelshaus Center to convene and lead a Jail Modernization Task Force (Task Force) to consider the WSIPP findings. The Task Force should also consider any resulting legislation from the Criminal Sentencing Task Force and the Joint Legislative Task Force on Jail Standards and other pertinent issues. The Task Force should report its findings and recommendations and submit them to the legislature in an initial report by July 1, 2025 and a final report by December 31, 2025.

### Outcome

WSAC was successful in getting the legislature to include a proviso in the State Operating Budget commissioning WSIPP to conduct a study on the jail system and a coinciding Jail Modernization Task Force led by the Ruckelshaus Center. In fact, the proviso ended up being more expansive than we'd hoped because it also includes a study of juvenile facilities. This expansion is an important step toward a more comprehensive understanding of our state's criminal justice system.



## Support the Critical Facilities Rural Counties Need

### Issue

The rural sales tax credit program dates back to 1998 and allows rural counties (33 of 39) to fund crucial economic development and affordable workforce housing programs. This is a very successful program that lets counties get more “bang for the buck” by partnering with other local agencies to maximize dollars and deliver needed infrastructure and facilities without tapping limited state capital funds. In short, it helps fund numerous small projects that might not otherwise make it into traditional state budgets, generating about \$50 million each year for rural counties to use without adding any new taxes. It works instead as a credit against state sales tax which is already collected. The credit is currently set to expire around 2034, depending on when a county first implemented it.

### Legislative Ask

Extend the tax through 2054. The effect on the state budget is small and already assumed, so there is no new fiscal impact on the state or taxpayers. The program has proven effective and accountable. It is critical to fund essential public facilities, promote economic growth and support affordable housing. Since such projects take time to develop and implement, rural counties need assurances that this fund source will be available in the future.

### Outcome

HB 1267 extends the expiration of the rural sales tax credit by another 20 years to 2054. This bill was enacted with near-unanimous bipartisan support and is expected to be signed into law by the Governor shortly. This extension gives locals the certainty needed to continue work and formulate long-term plans for projects that often need a long lead time to plan and construct. The bill also contains updated reporting requirements that will make it easier to track funds and projects across the state for future state and local planning and to ensure accountability.

# Federal Relations and Engagement

The Washington State Association of Counties works closely with the National Association of Counties (NACo) in federal policy development and advocacy pertaining to proposed federal legislation, agency actions as well as other federal issues and proposals that have direct impact and nexus to the operations and administration of county government in Washington State.

## 2023 Federal Priorities

### Medicaid Inmate Exclusion

Congress needs to reinstate federal health care benefits for non-convicted justice involved individuals. Congress must address the crisis caused by this callous Medicaid inmate exclusion policy that strips individuals who are still presumed innocent of their federal benefits.

### Payment In Lieu of Taxes (PILT)

This vital funding mechanism ensures counties receive property tax like compensation for federal lands within their boundaries. Full, predictable, and permanent mandatory funding for the PILT programs is needed to assure counties receive a property tax like compensation for federal lands within their boundaries. In Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2022, Washington's counties (37 of 39) received \$26.3 million in PILT.

### Secure Rural Schools (SRS)

Permanent reauthorization and funding of the SRS program is important to Washington State counties. In FFY21, Washington's counties (27 of 39) received \$16.02 million in SRS funding. We ask Congress to:

- Repeal the 5% automatic reduction in payment
- Restore full funding of SRS back to historic 25% funding level counties received with inflation built into the payment mechanism.
- Provide for yearly election of Title II/III designation
- Allow Resource Advisory Committee (RAC) appointments to be made at the regional or local forest level.

### Active Forest Management and Catastrophic Wildfires

Congress and the Administration must act to reduce the threat of catastrophic wildfire. A joint study conducted by the Washington State Department of Natural Resources, the United States Forest Service, and The Nature Conservancy found that 2.7 million acres of eastern Washington forestland needs restoration. Federal lands account for 42 percent of the unhealthy forest identified. Policies and legislation, as well as pilot programs and projects, are needed to renew the federal government's commitment to manage federal forests for the benefit of counties containing federal forestland. Management should be conducted in a manner that produces a sustainable resource yield, improves forest health, protects the environment, and aids in the prevention of catastrophic wildfires.

### Workforce and Homelessness Housing

The lack of affordable housing at the state and local level is a national crisis. Over the years, housing has become more and more unaffordable. Homeowners are forced to either live beyond their financial resources and/or live long distances from the communities in which they work. This commute creates transportation, transit, and social issues that put demands on counties' programs and services. This is certainly true in every county in Washington State. It is important that all levels of government collaborate, along with private sector and non-governmental organizations, on their respective roles in reducing housing costs and increasing the supply of affordable housing options, including the federal/county partnership. WSAC supports legislation and programs that makes funding available to state and local governments to address affordable and workforce housing needs.



# Counties Coastal Caucus

The Washington State Association of Counties created the Coastal Counties Caucus, comprised of 14 counties bordering Puget Sound, Strait of Juan de Fuca, and the Pacific Ocean shortly before the creation of the Puget Sound Partnership (PSP) in 2007. The Caucus creates a forum for Counties to interact, engage, and recommend WSAC positions on issues relating to the waters of Puget Sound, Hood Canal, and the Pacific Ocean. The program also supports members of the Puget Sound Partnership's Ecosystem Coordination Board and Salmon Recovery Council, both of which have County elected official representation. The Caucus works to ensure coastal county interests and priorities are brought forward to the Legislative Steering Committee, state and federal agencies, tribal nations, and other key stakeholders.

## 2022 Key Accomplishments

- Supported WSAC members serving on Puget Sound Partnership (PSP) Boards and Councils
- Represented and/or coordinated representation in PSP meetings and other state efforts that impact communities along the Puget Sound and Pacific coast
- Monitored and reported on Puget Sound Partnership efforts that involved county policy interests to WSAC policy staff and the Counties Coastal Caucus including the 2022-2026 Action Agenda items such as the RFP opportunities provided through the Habitat, Shellfish, and Stormwater Initiative Leads and engaging Congressional leaders with Puget Sound Day on the hill (virtual).
- Planned and coordinated the annual meeting for the WSAC Leaders Conference to include a briefing on the Floodplains by Design funding from the Bonneville Environmental Foundation and a joint discussion with County planning directors, Washington Environmental Council, WDFW, and tribes on developing and implementing a state net ecological gain policy.
- Assisted with the creation of a WSAC policy statement for statewide salmon recovery.
- Assisted policy staff with workgroup activities related to net ecological gain and riparian habitat standards.
- Communicated Puget Sound Partnership legislative priorities and opportunities for legislative briefings.
- Reviewed and commented on the National Heritage Area Management Plan.



# Columbia River Caucus

The Columbia River Basin Water Supply Development Program was initiated by the Legislature in 2006. The purpose of the program is to seek out and develop new water supply in eastern Washington. New water supplies are intended for both in-stream and out-of-stream use; water from projects funded by the program are allocated 1/3 for in-stream use and 2/3 for out-of-stream use.

WSAC receives funding from the Department of Ecology to provide staff support to eastern Washington county commissioners. This allows commissioners to participate as full partners in the program. The commissioners meet quarterly as the Columbia River Caucus.

## 2022 Key Accomplishments

- Caucus members continue to monitor Columbia River Treaty negotiations between the U.S. and Canada.
- New members were appointed to the Columbia River Policy Advisory Group (CRPAG). These members work with others on the CRPAG to advise the Office of Columbia River on administering the Columbia River Program. Counties have been part of the CRPAG since 2006.
- Held quarterly meetings of the Columbia River Caucus to inform members of the issues affecting the Columbia River system and to engage directly with Ecology.
- Completed a 5-part training series for members and other county staff on statewide water policy, the history of the Columbia River project and the Office of Columbia River, and issues impacting the Columbia River system.
- Monitored and advocated for county interests on several legislative proposals on water policy during the legislative session.
- Represent counties on the Washington Water Policy Association.
- Represented counties, along with three WSAC members on the Riparian Roundtable discussing statewide policy proposals for riparian regulations including restoration requirements.
- Provided feedback on the update of the Governor's Salmon Strategy.
- Received a presentation on the Colorado River Crisis and the ongoing megadrought.



# Timber and Public Lands Program

The timber counties program works diligently to support, advocate for, and represent our member counties with interests in timberland management issues. This includes counties that are beneficiaries of state forestlands and counties with other private, state, and federal forestlands utilized for commercial timber harvest, conservation, recreation, and other purposes.

## 2022 Key Accomplishments

- Elected a new county representative to the Board of Natural Resources after the retirement of Clallam County Commissioner Bill Peach. Skagit County Commissioner Lisa Janicki was elected by the timber counties to serve in that role.
- Completed a 2-day training course for members on timber lands management issues, including the history of forested state trust lands in Washington.
- Successfully advocated for extended funding to support WSAC's representative on the Cooperative Monitoring, Evaluation, & Research (CMER) Committee.
- Supported the successful passage of a \$10 million State Operating Budget proviso for the encumbered lands program.
- Developed a new set of policies for the encumbered lands programs that was approved and adopted by the WSAC Board of Directors.
- Held quarterly meetings with the Timber Counties Caucus members to receive reports from WSAC representatives on the Board of Natural Resources, TFW Policy Committee, CMER Committee, updates from DNR, and to provide information on developing topics in forest management.
- Implemented a "Timber 101" section for all quarterly caucus meetings to provide training on timber land management issues, continuing the purpose of the 2-day training course completed earlier in the year.
- Represented WSAC on each of the Adaptive Management Program functions, including the Forest Practices Board, Timber, Fish & Wildlife Policy, and CMER.
- Monitored and advocated for county interests on several legislative proposals during the legislative session.

# 2022 Financial Health

## 2022 Key Accomplishments

**1**

**Resourced ARPA support needs utilizing a one-time assessment to cover 4 years of staff assistance**

**2**

**Implemented a new dues assessment to recognize the increased staff resources for county and regional planning efforts**

**3**

**Procured a new audit firm and completed the 20/21 audit**

**4**

**Aligned programming and budgeted resources to address strategic goals**

# 2022 Financial Dashboard

**Total Assets:**  
**\$2,636,645**

**Cash: \$1,783,018**

**A/R & Prepaids: \$638,757**

**Fixed & Long-Term Assets: \$214,870**

**Net Assets:**  
**\$1,639,925**

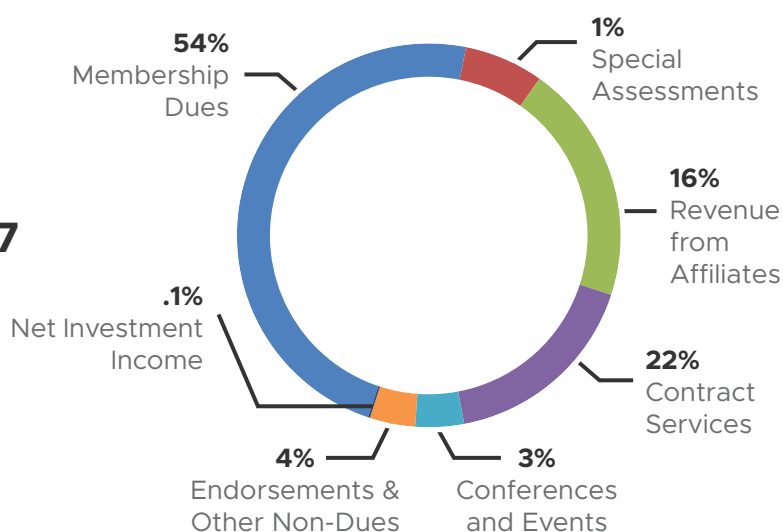
**Change from 2021: (\$441,052)**

**Liabilities:**  
**\$996,721**

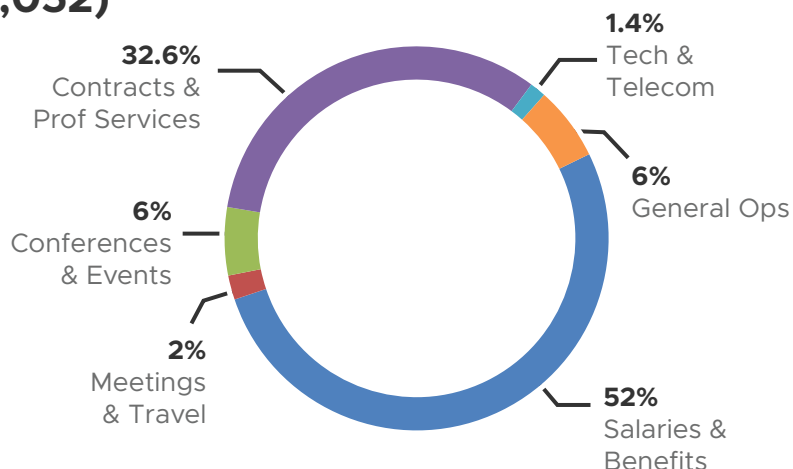
**Payables: \$821,721**

**Deferred Rev: \$175,000**

## 2022 Revenues Total: \$4,530,407



## 2022 Expenses Total: \$4,031,370





# Staff Directory

## Administration & Finance

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# Executive Committee

## Executive Committee 2022-2023

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**PRESIDENT**

**Mary Kuney**

Spokane County



**FIRST VICE  
PRESIDENT**

**Lisa Janicki**

Skagit County



**SECOND VICE  
PRESIDENT**

**Rob Coffman**

Lincoln County



**IMMEDIATE PAST  
PRESIDENT**

**Michael Largent**

Whitman County

## Board Members

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Scott Hutsell	Lincoln County
Dow Constantine	King County
Joe McDermott	King County
Jani Hitchen	Pierce County
Megan Dunn	Snohomish County
Josh Kerns	Spokane County
Glen Yung	Clark County
Tye Menser	Thurston County
Katie Walters	Kitsap County
Amanda McKinney	Yakima County
Satpal Sidhu	Whatcom County
Will McKay	Benton County
Wes McCart	Stevens County
Dan Sutton	Douglas County
LaDon Linde	Yakima County
Art Swannack	Whitman County
Janet St. Clair	Island County
Nate Nehring	Snohomish County
Mark Ozias	Clallam County
Christine Minney	San Juan County

## Alternates

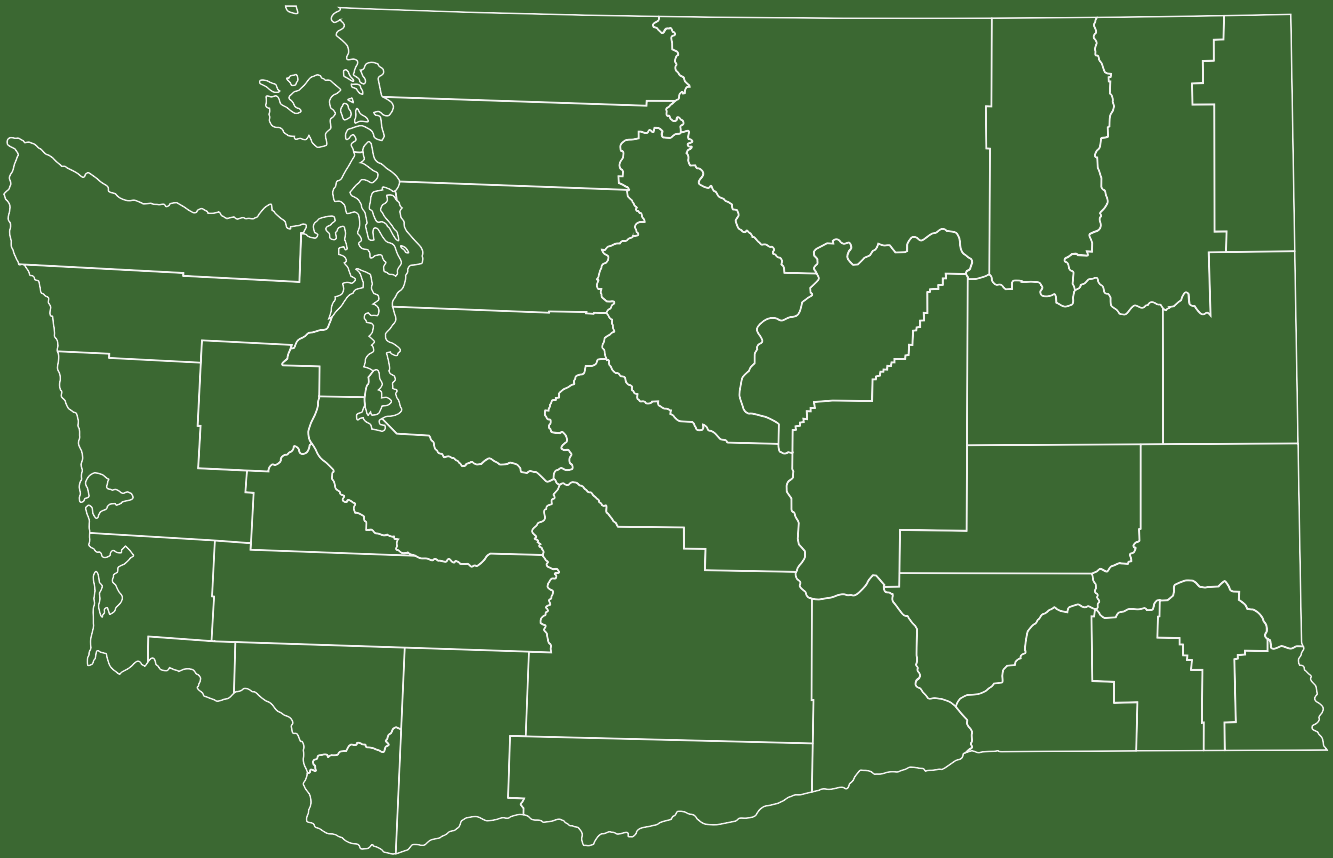
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Reagan Dunn	King County
Sarah Perry	King County
Ryan Mello	Pierce County
Jared Mead	Snohomish County
Al French	Spokane County
Karen Bowerman	Clark County
Gary Edwards	Thurston County
Kaylee Galloway	Whatcom County
Michael Alvarez	Benton County
Chris Seubert	Asotin County
Danny Stone	Grant County
Vickie Raines	Grays Harbor County
Dennis Weber	Cowlitz County









**WASHINGTON STATE ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES**

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