

2025-26 County Legislative Priorities

Our 39 counties are responsible for providing critical services to all residents, including city residents, such as law enforcement, court services, public records, elections, maintaining rural roads and bridges, public health, human services, and environmental protection. Many of the essential services counties provide cannot be obtained elsewhere. Ensuring counties have the necessary policy and fiscal tools is key to a successful Washington State.



Fiscal Sustainability

THE CHALLENGE

Counties are the least financially-diversified governments in the state. Property tax, with its limited growth potential, is our main revenue source.

THE FIX

Support the following strategies to improve county fiscal health:

1. Revise the 1% property tax growth limit to 3% (HB 1334)

2. Implement a local graduated REET

3. Implement a county utility tax (HB 1702)

4. Allocate a greater share of cannabis tax revenue (HB 1704/SB 5547)



Public Defense Reform

THE CHALLENGE

The state must provide adequate funding to meeting existing and future requirements for trial court public defense. Counties cannot continue to shoulder the vast majority of this burden alone.

THE FIX

HB 1592/SB 5404 ensures the state and counties are partners in providing services that meet the constitutional right to effective access to justice through effective legal representation.



Improving Behavioral Health

THE CHALLENGE

We must address systemic gaps and barriers that prevent people from accessing the services they need and make Medicaid work for community behavioral healthcare. Current Medicaid managed care policy defining adequate networks of behavioral healthcare does not recognize the full range and scope of behavioral health capacity needs.

THE FIX

HB 1813 improves contractual standards through Medicaid procurement.





County Housing Strategies

THE CHALLENGE

Many of the homes our state needs to improve housing access and affordability will not be built in cities. In our state, 34% of residents live outside cities. Outside of King County, 44% of residents live outside cities. However, counties have limited tools to address the housing crisis.

THE FIX

Support the following strategies:

1. HB 1345/SB 5470 authorizes detached ADUs on all residential lots.

2. HB 1840/SB 5471 expands county authority to increase development options in appropriate areas.

3. HB 1206/SB 5679 makes all GMA-planning counties eligible to utilize the MFTE program to incentivize multi-family housing.

4. HB 1763/SB 5576 expands state investment in infrastructure that supports housing.

5. Invest in a pilot program for counties to provide pre-designed housing plans.



County Transportation System Viability

THE CHALLENGE

Counties are responsible for nearly half of our state's roads and bridges, but the system in place for providing resources to maintain them remains inadequate.

THE FIX

Support the following strategies

1. Revise the 1% property tax growth limit to 3%. This is the county road fund's largest revenue source.

2. Implement a Road Usage Charge program to replace the gas tax with certain requirements that counties support.

3. Implement a local graduated REET. Funds can be utilized for capital facilities, including county transportation facilities.



Support Rural County Coroners

THE CHALLENGE

In 2021, the legislature passed HB 1326, requiring counties with less than 40,000 people to have an independent coroner by 2025. This mandate impacts 13 rural counties where cost is a major obstacle.

THE FIX

SB 5089 provides funding support for 6 years to rural counties have time to adjust.



Clean Energy Project Benefits

THE CHALLENGE

When EFSEC issues a siting approval for a clean energy project and construction or operation begins, they prefer to work with local government service providers for help in inspections, reviews, and other technical requirements. However, local governments may face liability risks from violating their own development codes if the projects EFSEC oversees don't conform to local land use regulations.

THE FIX

SB 5317 amends state law to afford local governments liability protections from appeals and claims related to local development violations when cooperating with EFSEC to provide services.

