



## CITY OF SEATTLE 2011 STATE LEGISLATIVE BULLETIN

January 24, 2011

Number 2

### ***Weekly Overview***

The week started with five City Councilmembers spending Martin Luther King Day in Olympia lobbying primarily on behalf of key human services programs at risk in the supplemental budget and short term transit funding. Councilmembers Bagshaw, Burgess, Clark, Godden, and Licata made the rounds, crisscrossing the campus all day for a total of 23 meetings.

On Wednesday the House Ways and Means Committee passed an early-action budget cutting bill ([HB 1086](#)) out of committee (more details below). The bill preserves some key programs, but still makes deep cuts. House Democrats report that, even with the cuts in this bill, they still need to [cut another \\$260 million](#) to balance the budget for this biennium.

Many legislators, lobbyists, and staff have described this session as unique because the Legislature is grappling with a massive budget deficit right out of the gate. Debates and dynamics we usually see at the end of session are happening at the beginning. And yet, the regular process of public hearings on bills continues, at a dizzying pace. It feels like both the beginning and end of session at the same time.

The second week saw the pace of bill hearings pick up significantly. Every Thursday, the Legislature publishes the schedule for the following week. They used to follow that schedule closely. Not anymore. This year, they frequently change the schedule after it's initially published, adding bills to hearings (in some cases, bills that were just introduced), removing bills, or moving them from one day to another. This new process causes a much more dynamic schedule in Olympia.

As of Sunday, we have 451 bills in our bill analysis system, and in this week's bulletin we have for the first time included live links to more information on many of the bills we discuss below.

Much of the early action in committee has centered on public safety and criminal justice issues, which we discuss in more detail below.

### ***Areas of Primary Focus***

**Budget**: On Wednesday evening the House Ways & Means Committee passed an early-action budget bill. We expect this bill to be voted on by the full House sometime next week.

This bill is called an early-action budget bill instead of a supplemental budget bill because it does not close the entire remaining budget gap for the year ending June 30, 2011. Even with the cuts and transfers in this bill, and the \$600 million in special session cuts made in December 2010, there remains a \$260 million hole in the budget for this biennium.

The House early-action budget bill that passed out of committee last week saves or reduces cuts to several key programs that were eliminated in the Governor's supplemental budget, including:

- **Disability Lifeline (formerly GAU):** restores funding
- **Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHC):** restores \$12 million of the \$40 million cut for FQHC reimbursement rates (\$5 million in State funds and \$7 million in leveraged federal funds)
- **Working Connections Child Care:** directs the Department of Early Learning to stop implementation of rule changes previously adopted to restrict eligibility in the program to families below 175 percent of the federal poverty level effective January 31, 2011
- **Apple Health for Kids:** restores funding
- **Limited English Pathways (LEP):** restores half of the funding
- **Highly Capable Program:** restores funding
- **Basic Health Plan (BHP):** restores funding through the end of April, but it is unclear how the program will be funded beyond April

In addition, the House budget plan transfers \$17 million from the state **Model Toxics Control Account (MTCA)** to help fund the programs mentioned above.

Transit Funding: Legislation that would provide short term funding for transit has been drafted and co-sponsors are signing on. We expect it to be introduced soon.

Fiscal Flexibility: Legislation that would provide additional fiscal flexibility for local governments has been drafted and co-sponsors are signing on. We expect it to be introduced soon.

Criminal Justice: The Senate Judiciary Committee had a public hearing on [SB 5236](#), which creates a review mechanism for those who committed the least serious offenses under the "three strikes law" and are currently serving life sentences. Seattle supports legislation that modifies the state's "Three Strikes Law" to impose a mandatory 15-year minimum sentence instead of mandatory life-without-parole sentence for offenders with only Class B felony convictions not involving a sex offense or a deadly weapon enhancement finding.

Education: This week both the House and Senate Education Committees spent most of their time in work sessions focusing on policy and budget priorities in K-12 and higher education, including state funding and the impacts of proposed cuts, governance structures, higher education tuition setting authority, and the education reform experience in Washington, including standards, assessments, and accountability. Next week we expect these committees to turn their attention to specific policy and appropriations bills.

## ***Other Issues of Significant Interest***

Medical Cannabis: The Senate Health and Long-Term Care Committee held a packed public hearing on [SB 5073](#). The bill would provide protection for qualifying patients and their providers, clarify methods for obtaining medical cannabis, and set up a licensing and rulemaking procedure to regulate dispensaries. John Schochet from the City Attorney's office testified in favor of the legislation on behalf of City Attorney Pete Holmes and provided a letter to the committee that included a number of suggested amendments that would help provide better clarity for law enforcement, among other things.

Vulnerable Roadway Users: The Senate Judiciary Committee held a public hearing on [SB 5326](#), which creates a new infraction and penalties for drivers who injure vulnerable roadway users. Seattle supports this legislation, and John Schochet from the City Attorney's office testified at the public hearing. The House introduced a companion bill, HB 1339.

Complete Streets: The House Transportation Committee held a public hearing on [HB 1071](#), which would require the state Department of Transportation to establish a complete streets grant program. Seattle supports this legislation.

Land Use: There is a lot of appetite this session to change land use laws. For example, a number of bills have been introduced that would change the Seashore Management Act (SMA) and Growth Management Act (GMA) or make other changes to land use rules and planning processes. Seattle opposes efforts to weaken or undermine the GMA & SMA and will continue to watch this legislation.

## ***Looking Ahead***

Operating Budget: On Monday, the full House is scheduled to vote on the early action budget bill, HB 1086. There are a number of amendments on the bar, and the floor debate should provide a preview for recurring themes we are likely to see throughout the session. Focus will then shift to the Senate, where we will have to work once again on preserving key programs such as Disability Lifeline, Working Connections Childcare, and funding for community health clinics.

Capital Budget: Most of the capital budget hearings have been cancelled to date, but next week we expect the House Capital Budget Committee to hold a hearing on the Governor's proposed capital budget for the 2011-2013 biennium ([HB 1497](#)). In addition, the amount of funds available for the capital budget is still unclear; some estimates have been as low as \$85 million.

Automated Traffic Safety Cameras: The Senate Transportation Committee is holding a public hearing on two bills Seattle supports: [SB 5188](#) and [SB 5301](#). These bills would provide useful improvements to automated traffic safety camera programs.

Public Records: The Senate Government Operations and Tribal Relations & Elections Committee is holding public hearings on a number of bills related to the Public Records Act. The highlight is [SB 5088](#), which allows public agencies to recover personnel costs for public records requests if the production of the records requires more than five person hours per calendar month. This bill would have a significant fiscal impact for the City of Seattle because it would allow us to recover personnel costs for responding to voluminous requests.

State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA): The [House Environment Committee](#) has scheduled an overview of SEPA for Tuesday, January 25. At the work session the committee members will learn the history and evolution of SEPA and also hear perspectives from stakeholders—including cities, counties, businesses, and environmental advocates—on how SEPA is working and what changes might be appropriate. A bill will likely be introduced soon after the work session to streamline part of SEPA.