

# AWC Advocacy Academy

September 23, 2025



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## Agenda

1. Why should you advocate at the state level?
2. Navigating the legislative process
3. Knowing and using your power to effectively advocate for your city
4. Questions & Answers



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# Why Should You Advocate at the State Level?



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Many of the budget decisions made by legislators in Olympia have a direct financial impact on cities, towns, and their residents.

In short, legislators decide *who gets what. . . and who pays for what*

## **Shared revenue:**

- Liquor profits and liquor taxes
- Marijuana excise tax
- Streamlined sales tax
- Criminal justice
- 6050
- Annexation sales tax credit
- Fire insurance premium

## **Funding (or lack of funding) for city budget priorities and obligations:**

- Pension costs
- Law enforcement and public safety
- Housing programs and grants
- Infrastructure grants and loans
- Transportation infrastructure and maintenance
- Behavioral health projects
- Capital project funding



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Legislators also enact policies that impact your city's operations and your residents' daily lives:

- Recent topics of policy bills
  - *Density mandates*
  - *Bargaining standards*
  - *Elections*
  - *Liability*
  - *Policing procedures*
  - *Conversion of existing buildings*
  - *To residential uses*



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## By taking an active role in advocacy, city leaders can:

- Help maintain and grow local revenues
- Stop or shape policies that harm cities or limit community decision-making
- Ensure city interests are key considerations in policy debates
- Shape political narratives
- Influence policy outcomes
- Serve constituents and help improve their lives

“Politics is like water; it follows the path of least resistance”

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# Navigating the legislative process



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## Quick facts about the Washington State Legislature

- Bicameral (2 chamber) Legislature
  - **49 Senate** members
  - **98 House** members
  - **49 leg. districts:** 2 Reps. & 1 Senator
- Convenes the second Monday in January of each year
  - **60 days** in even-numbered years
  - **105 days** in odd-numbered years
- The Legislature passes the two-year budgets in odd-numbered years
- Representatives are elected to a two-year term
  - Elections held in even-numbered years
- Senators are elected to four-year staggered terms
  - Half of the membership stands for election in even-numbered years
- **Sine Die** is the last day of the legislative session



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## The Legislative Process

- Navigating the legislative process can seem intimidating
- Full of jargon and acronyms
- Can seem complicated (and it often is)
- Can come off uncomfortably formal
- Where do I start?



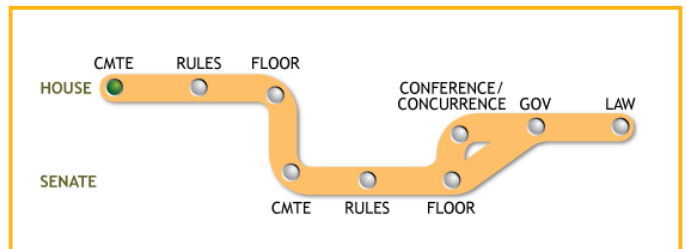
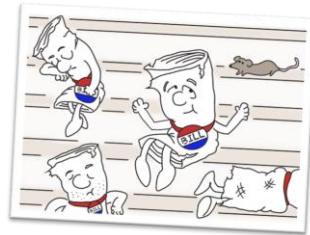
- You don't need to be a lobbyist or lawyer to engage and have your voice heard
- In fact, effective participation in the legislative process is critical for cities and city leaders
- No more complicated than the local legislative process – just a little different
- AWC has staff, resources, and tools to make engaging in the legislative process easy and accessible for you!



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## How a Bill Becomes a Law

- Idea is drafted into bill form
- Sponsored by legislator
- Introduced and referred to committee
- Public hearing in policy committee
- Voted out of policy committee
- Public hearing in fiscal committee
- Voted out of fiscal committee (if applicable)
- Rules Committee
- Majority puts it on calendar for vote
- Floor vote
- Process begins in opposite chamber
- Passage of identical measures
- Signature or veto by Governor



Thousands are introduced each year - most die before becoming law

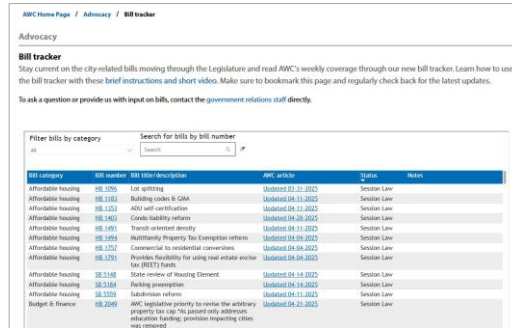


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# Online resources



leg.wa.gov



wacities.org/advocacy/bill-tracker

# Knowing and using your power to effectively advocate for your city



## Your power as a city leader

- As elected officials and city leaders you hold a significant amount of power to influence decision makers.
- Provide access to constituents and key relationships
- Ability to give endorsements and publicity (Op. Eds, LTEs etc.)\*
- Capacity to provide election assistance (organizing volunteers, fund raising etc.)\*
- Provide expertise or public testimony on issues
- Ability to mobilize people for or against an issues
- Power to unite 281 cities in support or against an issue (AWC)

*\* Always in compliance with PDC rules*



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## Working with others at City Hall

- Getting all your elected officials involved
- Have they built a relationship with your local legislators?
- Do you invite your local legislators to visit Council meetings or to check out projects you are working on?
- Staff experts vs. electeds – use both!
- Experts can be helpful and add credibility but be wary of being too technical. Know the needs of your audience



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## Legislative success: Session is only the tip of the iceberg



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## Legislative Advocacy: A Year-Round Job

- Begin building a relationship with your legislators during the summer and fall before session begins (bonus points if they are up for election)
- Participate in legislative elections
  - Do your research and hold a face-to-face meeting before offering your endorsement
  - Publicly thank legislators who have helped your city and be candid about those who haven't
  - Help organize volunteers for legislative candidates you support and be visible
- Develop your city's legislative agenda
  - Keep it short and simple – one page only
  - Include AWC's legislative priorities
  - Make it public and share it (FB, Twitter/X, Website, etc.)
- Other ways to engage
  - Volunteer for AWC's legislative priorities committee
  - Work with other cities and towns in your region
  - Ask AWC for help



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# Build relationships & communicate effectively

Start before you need something

Be familiar with their focus and interest

Get into the habit of sharing information

Make sure they know your city's story

Be clear about what you need and why

Don't be shy about difficult conversations

This is a group effort – Work together



# Testifying

- Public Hearing v. Work Session
- Know your timeframe – public hearing testimony is likely 1-2 minutes.
- Work sessions
- Signing in – electronic sign in process
- All committees now allow remote testimony
- Following up afterwards
  - Good opportunity to email the whole committee including staff



## Written comments

- Providing written comments is also effective. Remember to stay concise
- Email the whole committee and staff, as well as members' LAs
- Copy the AWC lead on the issue so we can follow up
- This is a way to request amendments to bills, the more specific the better
- Legislators always prefer when alternative solutions are offered rather than complete opposition



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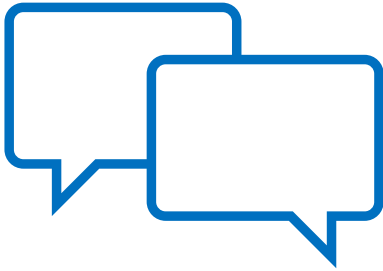
## Communications Tips & Tricks

- Emails, letters, phone calls, meetings
- No matter what – be concise!
- Legislators' staff manage/screen these contacts
- Different approaches at different times in session
- Add individualized information to any form letter/email
- When and who to send your communications to:
  - Bill or project specific
  - Copying committee or caucus staff
  - Always copy the LA
  - Use AWC resources/information for background



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# Common excuses and how to respond



Cities can raise their own revenue

I am not on the committee

Cities want to be preempted

Cities should control their own costs

The state has other budget priorities

It's not an unfunded mandate if it is the right thing to do



# Legislators' advocacy advice for city officials



Sit down eye to eye and go over your budget with your legislators



Don't just rely on lobbyists – "We need to hear directly from city officials"



Have a unified message



Reach out to legislators all year long – but the earlier the better



Come with ideas and solutions



# Recent examples of city engagement on legislative issues



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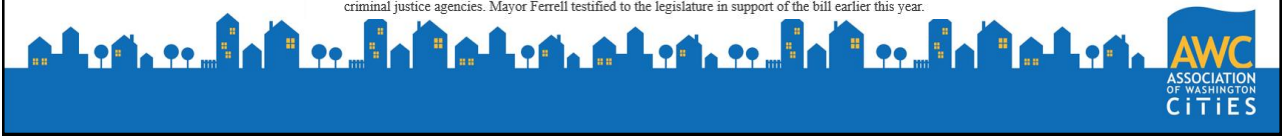


## Mayor Ferrell and Chief Hwang Visit Capitol for Signing of HB 2015



Mayor Jim Ferrell and Federal Way Police Department Chief Andy Hwang traveled to Olympia last week for the signing of HB 2015. They joined 30th District Representative Kristine Reeves, who was a co-sponsor of the bill, as Governor Bob Ferguson signed it into law.

HB 2015 improves public safety funding by providing resources to local governments and state and local criminal justice agencies. Mayor Ferrell testified to the legislature in support of the bill earlier this year.



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**Collective Statement from South King County Mayors  
Regarding House Bill 1380**

January 21, 2025  
 Representative Mia Gregerson  
 321 John L. O'Brien Building  
 PO Box 40600  
 Olympia, WA 98504

Dear Rep. Gregerson,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on House Bill 1380. While we understand that the intent behind this proposal is to protect those individuals experiencing homelessness and occupying the public right-of-way and other spaces, we are concerned that this bill will compromise public safety, interfere with the intended uses of public spaces, and lead to litigation rather than solutions. We are the State's partner in helping individuals experiencing homelessness get access to crisis services, substance use treatment, mental health services, health care, shelter, and other services, and we encourage you to be our partner in bringing services to these individuals.



## Comment: Cities needs modest tax hike to meet growing needs

State legislation would allow cities to increase property tax levies by 3% each year, rather than 1%.

Saturday, February 22, 2025 1:30am | **OPINION** COMMENTARY




By Cassie Franklin and Kyoko Matsumoto Wright / For The Herald

Cities across Washington state are working hard to combat significant and expensive challenges, ranging from public safety to quality-of-life issues such as the drug epidemic, housing crisis and violent crime.

We're also waging a constant battle against the growing impacts of our state's 1 percent cap on property tax levy increases. This limit puts our cities in increasingly difficult positions each year as we watch inflation drive up costs, our populations grow and the demand for services increase; all while our most significant and stable revenue source, property taxes, remain stagnant.

We're joining together with other local leaders to ask the state Legislature to lift the cap on property tax increases from a maximum of 1 percent per year to 3 percent. This would give our cities a fighting chance to sustain the essential services our communities rely on while not overly burdening taxpayers, adding just \$20 to the average homeowner's annual tax bill.

# When you see one of these, please follow up



**action alert!**

Urgent information from your lobbyists on the hill.

Dear Mayors, City Managers, and Finance Officers:

Our records indicate that your city imposes a water and/or sewer utility tax rate above 6%. [SB 6115](#) would place a 6% cap on water and sewer utility taxes, unless voter approved, and would require cities with higher taxes to decrease their rates over time.

This week, the Senate Government Operations & Security Committee considered the proposal and could vote on it this week. Your Senator is a member of this committee.

Please [contact](#) your Senator as soon as possible and ask them to oppose [SB 6115](#).

Here are some key messages to share:

- Like the state, cities are struggling to provide essential public services.
- The utility tax is a primary revenue source for cities.
- Most city revenue streams are already restricted in some way.
- Cities need to retain the local flexibility with water and sewer utility taxes.
- Locally elected officials are already accountable to voters in their communities.

Please let AWC's [Victoria Lincoln](#) or [Serena Dolly](#) know when you've contacted your Senator, as we would like to follow up on your efforts. Don't hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue.

Association of Washington Cities • 1076 Franklin St SE • Olympia, WA 98501

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360.753.4137 | 1.800.562.8981  
wacities.org

March 3, 2025

Members of the Washington State Legislature:

We write to urge you to pass legislation to revise the arbitrary 1% local property tax cap that has been in place for more than 20 years—over a generation. The current cap is lower than both inflation and population growth, and cities are left struggling to keep up with rising costs of providing basic community services like police, fire, parks, and streets.

We ask you to support a modest increase that ties the cap more closely to population growth and inflation, up to 3%. This reasonable change is more reflective of the last decade's average yearly 3% inflation rate and 1.5% yearly population growth.

We understand the reluctance to act on taxes; however, our communities need more flexibility in local funding options to keep up with the rising costs for services. Lifting this cap modestly would provide a crucial, optional tool that empowers city elected leaders to make decisions close to home on behalf of their residents, when and how they need it.

Without a change, local governments cannot sustain public safety and other basic services to keep up with our residents' needs. In fact, in 2001 cities had 1 employee to serve every 80 city residents; and in 2023, cities had 1 employee to serve every 108 city residents.

For too long, local governments have patched together band-aid solutions to manage the structural funding deficit while being called on to do more with less—but we're at a tipping point.

Allowing local elected officials to raise their property tax revenues by up to 3% per year puts the decision-making power back into our communities. Local elected officials have a high rate of trust among their constituents, and they are immediately accountable to the voters. Legislative action on this issue in 2025 is not an automatic tax increase. Instead, it allows for thoughtful local debate and discussion about what will work best for each city.

Now is the time for this change. Cities must continue to provide these important community services and cannot wait another 20 years to shift the burden onto the next generation.

Please use this legislative session to pass a modest increase to this restriction on our cities.

Sincerely,

Troy Linnell, Mayor, Algona	Adolfo Bailon, City Manager, Burien
David M. White, Councilmember, Algona	Alex Andrade, Councilmember, Burien
Don Vanney, Mayor, Arlington	Hugo Garcia, Councilmember, Burien
Cheryl Rakes, Deputy Mayor, Auburn	David Olson, Mayor, Cathlamet
Kate Baldwin, Councilmember, Auburn	Cathleen Koch, City Administrator, Connell
Nancy Backus, Mayor, Auburn	Linda Springer, Mayor, Cosmopolis
Lynne Robinson, Mayor, Bellevue	Regan Boli, City Manager, Covington
Mayor Kim Lund, Mayor, Bellingham	Traci Buxton, Mayor, Des Moines
Michael Liliquist, Councilmember, Bellingham	Katherine Caffrey, City Manager, Des Moines
Valerie Rosman, Councilmember, Brier	Carma Oaksmith, Finance Director, DuPont

Michael Winkler, Deputy Mayor, DuPont  
Amy McHenry, Councilmember, Duvall  
Amy Ockerlander, Mayor, Duvall  
Jenilee Crawford, Mayor, East Wenatchee  
Mike Rosen, Mayor, Edmonds  
Will Chen, Councilmember, Edmonds  
Jenna Nand, Councilmember, Edmonds  
Cassie Franklin, Mayor, Everett  
Judy Tuohy, Councilmember, Everett  
Paula Rhyne, Councilmember, Everett  
Hunter George, Councilmember, Fircrest  
Denice Kulseth, City Administrator, Friday Harbor  
Mary Barber, Mayor, Gig Harbor  
Holly Beller, City Administrator, Ilwaco  
Barbara de Michele, Deputy Council President, Issaquah  
Kelly Jiang, Councilmember, Issaquah  
Lindsay Walsh, Council President, Issaquah  
Mary Lou Pauly, Mayor, Issaquah  
Zach Hall, Councilmember, Issaquah  
Nigel Herbig, Mayor, Kenmore  
Erin Erdman, City Manager, Kennewick  
Chuck Torelli, Mayor Pro Tem, Kennewick  
John Boyd, Councilmember, Kent  
Zandra Michaud, Councilmember, Kent  
K.C. Kasberg, Mayor Pro Tem, La Center  
Larry Goldman, Councilmember, Lake Forest Park  
Lorri Bodi, Deputy Mayor, Lake Forest Park  
Paula Goode, Councilmember, Lake Forest Park  
Phillip Hill, City Administrator, Lake Forest Park  
Serra Riddle, Councilmember, Lake Forest Park  
Tom French, Mayor, Lake Forest Park  
Tracy Furutani, Councilmember, Lake Forest Park  
Carl Florea, Mayor, Leavenworth  
David Glasson, City Administrator, Long Beach  
Sue Svendsen, Mayor, Long Beach  
George Hurst, Councilmember, Lynnwood  
Jon Nehring, Mayor, Marysville  
Tara Leininger, Mayor, Metairie Falls  
Gretchen Sagen, CFO, Montesano  
Tyler Trimble, Mayor, Montesano  
Valerie Jester, Councilmember, Montesano  
Louis Harris, Councilmember, Mukilteo  
Michael Dixon, Councilmember, Mukilteo  
Amy Arington, City Manager, Normandy Park  
Susan West, Councilmember, Normandy Park  
Dontae Payne, Mayor, Olympia  
George Martinez, City Administrator, Pacific  
Vic Krave, Mayor, Pacific  
Kale Dexter, Mayor, Port Angeles  
Nathan West, City Manager, Port Angeles  
Rob Putansaus, Mayor, Port Orchard  
Amy Howard, Deputy Mayor, Port Townsend  
Becky Erickson, Mayor, Poulsbo  
Doug Taber, Councilmember, Poulsbo

Dee Roberts, Mayor, Raymond  
Angela Birney, Mayor, Redmond  
Jessica Forsythe, Council Vice President, Redmond  
Vanessa Kritzler, City Council President, Redmond  
Armondo Pavone, Mayor, Renton  
Ed Prince, Councilmember, Renton  
James Aberson, Councilmember, Renton  
Kim-Khian Yan, Councilmember, Renton  
Valerie O'Halloran, Councilmember, Renton  
Ruth Perez-Ralston, Councilmember, Renton  
Micki Harris, Councilmember, Rockford  
Karen Howe, Mayor, Sammamish  
Pam Stuart, Councilmember, Sammamish  
Amy Lam, Deputy Mayor, Sammamish  
Bruce Harrell, Mayor, Seattle  
Dan Strauss, Councilmember, Seattle  
Julia Johnson, Mayor, Sedro-Woolley  
Kevin Wickenhagen, Mayor Pro Tem, Selah  
Chris Robers, Mayor, Shoreline  
Keith Scully, Councilmember, Shoreline  
Annette Adamesu, Councilmember, Shoreline  
Carolyn Norris, Mayor, South Prairie  
Mark Kauzlarich, Councilmember, South Prairie  
Terri Berry, Clerk-Treasurer, South Prairie  
Betsy Wilkerson, Council President, Spokane  
Lili Navarrete, Councilmember, Spokane  
Zack Zappone, Councilmember, Spokane  
Kity Klitzke, Councilmember, Spokane  
Paul Dillon, Councilmember, Spokane  
Ben Wick, Councilmember, Spokane Valley  
Richard Mui, Mayor, Steilacoom  
Kathy Hayden, Mayor, Sumner  
Joe Bushnell, Councilmember, Tacoma  
John Hines, Councilmember, Tacoma  
Oggy Diaz, Councilmember, Tacoma  
Sandesh Sadalge, Councilmember, Tacoma  
Sarah Rumbaugh, Councilmember, Tacoma  
Victoria Woodards, Mayor, Tacoma  
Thomas McLeod, Mayor, Tukwila  
Debbie Wilson, Mayor, Tumwater  
James Wellstain, City employee, Turnwater  
Sharon Bounds, City Manager, Union Gap  
Edward Wood, Mayor Pro Tem, University Place  
Erik Paulsen, Mayor Pro Tem, Vancouver  
Kim Harless, Councilmember, Vancouver  
Sarah Fox, Councilmember, Vancouver  
Ty Stober, Councilmember, Vancouver  
Randy Hinchliffe, City Administrator, Walsburg  
Elizabeth Chamberlain, City Manager, Walla Walla  
Linda Herald, Mayor Pro Tem, Wenatchee  
Brent Gerry, Mayor, West Richland  
Fred Brink, Mayor Pro Tem, West Richland  
Kale Moran, Councilmember, West Richland  
Marla Keethler, Mayor, White Salmon  
Steve Gunn, Councilmember, Woodway

strong cities | great state

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# Review

1. We understand the importance of city leader advocacy and its role in impacting legislative outcomes.
2. We navigated the legislative process.
3. We have a better sense of our own power to influence the process and have seen some examples.
4. Now we are ready to use what we've learned, and the tools provided by AWC, to effectively advocate for our cities!



# Contact us!

**Candice Bock**

Director of Government Relations

Email: [CandiceB@awcnet.org](mailto:CandiceB@awcnet.org)

Issue areas – Economic development; federal; finance; human resources & labor relations; liability; open government; parks; pensions; taxes & budgets

**Carl Schroeder**

Deputy Director of Government Relations

Email: [CarlS@awcnet.org](mailto:CarlS@awcnet.org)

Issue areas – Building codes; environment & natural resources; housing & homelessness; land use & planning

**Steven Ellis**

Government Relations Advocate

Email: [StevenE@awcnet.org](mailto:StevenE@awcnet.org)

Issue areas – Public works & infrastructure; telecommunications; transportation; utilities & energy

**Derrick Nunnally**

Government Relations Advocate

Email: [DerrickN@awcnet.org](mailto:DerrickN@awcnet.org)

Issue areas – Cannabis; emergency management; general government; human services & behavioral health; public safety & criminal justice

