

September 11, 2024

Governor Jay Inslee  
Office of the Governor  
PO Box 40002  
Olympia, WA 98504

Dear Governor Inslee:

As you and your agencies work to develop the 2025-27 biennial budgets, AWC looks forward to working with you and the Legislature to address the opportunities to build strong cities and towns that support our great state. We recognize ongoing fiscal challenges but know that there continue to be opportunities to partner in areas like public safety, behavioral health, infrastructure, housing, and climate change. Washington's 281 cities and towns are committed to working alongside our state partners as we navigate these opportunities and challenges.

As you prepare your budget proposals, we ask for your support for these programs that are crucial to Washington's cities and towns.


- **Enhancing public safety** – Last year your budget proposed \$10 million in grant funding to support cities' efforts to hire and retain law enforcement officers. We ask that you again include this proposal to help hire more officers. We also ask for an increase the funding allocated to the Municipal Criminal Justice Assistance Account to help cities, particularly those experiencing higher crime rates, with public safety needs. Additionally, cities request a permanent solution to the state funding of multi-jurisdictional drug task forces in the wake of the loss of the Byrne-JAG grants. We appreciate the one-time backfill funding in the 2024 supplemental budget, but ongoing funds are needed to maintain these critical law enforcement efforts to address the flow of fentanyl and other harmful illegal drugs into our communities.
- **Developing law enforcement training capacity** – Cities support continuing to establish new regional law enforcement training academies and expand capacity at current regional academies. Cities also ask that the state to permanently maintain the historic practice of fully funding the BLEA tuition for new recruits. That tradition ended during the great recession when the state passed off 25% of the tuition costs to the local government but was restored in the 2025 FY. We ask to return to fully funding BLEA at a cost of approximately \$4.5 million annually. We also support the much-needed replacement of the Criminal Justice Training Center (CJTC) main facility which is woefully outdated and undersized for modern law enforcement training needs.
- **Investing in infrastructure** – Retain full funding for the Public Works Assistance Account while looking at options for increasing available funding levels. With the cost and need increasing, now is the time to invest more in this highly regarded keystone program for funding local infrastructure. With the enormous need for new housing, we can't overlook the role of providing adequate infrastructure to spur and support that development. We ask for increased funding for the Connecting Housing and Infrastructure Program (CHIP) to help make that possible. Additionally, some smaller cities and towns struggle to access state and federal grant funding opportunities so we would encourage the creation of a specific technical assistance program to help these small communities access available funding opportunities.
- **Enhancing indigent defense** – The State Supreme Court is exploring changes to indigent defense caseload standards that could have a significant impact on the number of public defenders cities must fund costing \$150 to \$200 million. This conversation highlights the fact that currently the state provides very little financial

support for municipal public defense. Cities ask the state to be a larger fiscal partner in providing these constitutionally mandated services and help our criminal justice system function more effectively.

- **Increasing access to behavioral health** – Cities support continued investments in behavioral health services, facilities, and workforce. Cities have seen great success with alternative response programs like co-responder and CARES teams. We ask for an additional \$2 million annually in grant funding to support these programs that are a critical part of the continuum of behavioral health services.
- **Investing in local government transportation systems** – Cities ask for continued support of the Transportation Improvement Board and Freight Mobility Strategic Investment Board to maintain our current systems. The lack of investment, in part, means that city streets (as part of state highways) rated below 45 mph and freeway ramps have been deprioritized, creating significant safety concerns. We urge that you commit to maintaining and providing new transportation investments to meet residents' needs.
- **Planning for growth** – Cities are committed to thoughtful, and community based comprehensive planning under the Growth Management Act. We ask for the state's continued support to fund this work and avoid new unfunded or underfunded requirements, particularly as many jurisdictions work to complete statutorily required updates.
- **Preserving support for small cities and towns** – Through the City County Assistance Funds, the state has provided dedicated assistance to cities with low retail tax bases since the early 2000s when the MVET was eliminated as the source for the sales tax equalization program. Most of the cities and towns receiving these funds are small or very small. The funding for this assistance account comes from a small share of the State's REET. Decreased REET revenues resulted in a loss of about \$10 million for this critical assistance program. These cities and towns would benefit from funding to backfill a portion of the loss.
- **Improving fish passage** – Please continue the efforts to enhance funding for the Brian Abbott Fish Barrier Removal Board. We continue to ask the state to keep a broad vision in mind as you tackle the fish barrier question. It does the fish no good to get past a newly corrected state culvert if they immediately run into a local barrier. We need comprehensive approaches like those from the Fish Barrier Removal Board.
- **Responding to the affordable housing and homelessness crisis** – Please continue your support for significant investments in the Housing Trust Fund. Cities are planning for hundreds of thousands of affordable homes that won't be built without more public support. Cities continue to support of the rights of way initiative that has been successful in helping transition those who are living unsheltered in state rights of way into more stable housing. Cities also ask that you expand this program to include local rights of way and look for opportunities to increase funding for emergency and transitional housing.
- **Protecting the environment** - Cities urge the state to unwind the General Fund transfer from Model Toxics Control Account (MTCA). Specifically, restoring \$50 million in General Fund for environmental programs and putting the \$50 million in MTCA back for its intended purpose of reducing toxic pollution.
- **Supporting PFAS treatment and mitigation** – Standards for PFAS contamination have recently been made more rigorous by the EPA and detection of PFAS in our drinking water systems continues to occur. We ask that the state prioritize funding and technical support for impacted municipal drinking water systems.
- **Assisting communities with asylum seekers** – A recent increase in arriving asylum seekers has created significant impacts on some cities. Cities need state leadership and support to provide necessary services to this new population.

Thank you for considering these important funding proposals and for your ongoing support for the cities and towns of Washington State.

Sincerely,



Candice Bock  
Government Relations Director



Deanna Dawson  
Chief Executive Officer

cc: Pat Sullivan, Director, Office of Financial Management  
Joby Shimomura, Chief of Staff  
K.D. Chapman-See, Legislative Liaison, Office of Financial Management  
Senator June Robinson, Vice Chair, Ways & Means Committee  
Senator Lynda Wilson, Ranking Member, Ways & Means Committee  
Representative Timm Ormsby, Chair, Appropriations Committee  
Representative Chris Corry, Ranking Member, Appropriations Committee