

2025 AWC Federal Legislative Priorities

Objective statement:

Washington cities support community-based decision making; direct federal funding to cities to support critical local services; and oppose federal policies that undermine local government regulatory authority, impose unfunded mandates, or preempt local government revenues and revenue authorities.

Maintain stable and reliable federal government operations

- Stable, reliable federal government operations are critical to cities and our residents. Cities urge congress to address budgets in a manner necessary to avoid the threat of or actual federal government shutdowns. Both the threat as well as actual shutdowns create uncertainty and fiscal and other hardships for our communities.

Continue to invest in local public infrastructure

- Pursue policy solutions and direct funding that support cities in meeting their basic infrastructure needs. Protect and ensure access to federal funding identified in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) for cities of all sizes. Ensure funding is available while minimizing costly grant application and other administrative burdens that may create a barrier to funding crucial projects.
- Ensure that infrastructure funding is available and accessible to all cities and towns regardless of resources. Specifically target funding to smaller jurisdictions under 5,000 and 1,000 in population. Provide more technical assistance and audit assistance to help cities and towns access and manage federal funding. Provide more opportunities for direct funding to cities and towns without relying on passthrough from state or regional planning organizations.
- Streamline permitting requirements to reduce the costs and time to update water and wastewater systems.
- Seek sustainable revenue sources to address the existing backlog of city infrastructure projects in Washington. While the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) has provided a much-needed infusion of funding to the State of Washington, ongoing investments are still needed.
- Support policies that will build climate resilient infrastructure and invest in sustainable technologies that will serve cities into the future.
- Ensure that as perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) lawmaking and regulations evolve, cities are explicitly recognized as “passive receivers” of PFAS and are therefore provided a narrow exemption from liability under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA). As cities continue to address PFAS in their water systems and beyond, funding and mitigation supports must be considered.
- Provide more support for implementing smart city technology, digital safety, and cybersecurity support for protecting vulnerable infrastructure. Support The Smart Cities and Communities Act introduced by Rep. DelBene.
- Support digital equity for our communities. Continue federal investment in programs like the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), which helps to make broadband access available to our most vulnerable populations. Expand broadband access in unserved, under-served, and hard-to-serve areas. Affordable, reliable, accessible broadband is essential to communities, small and large, to support basic services like healthcare and education, and to drive economic growth.

Invest in safe and healthy communities

- Support community centered, equitable programs that improve our behavioral health system and local response to the opioid addiction crisis. Efforts to reduce the number of illegal drug overdoses in our cities require a strong partnership between local, state, and federal health and law enforcement programs. Support efforts to stop illegal trafficking of fentanyl and other drugs. We must ensure that funds appropriated for substance abuse education and prevention, treatment, and recovery programs are accessible to cities. Provide assistance to help recruit and retain behavioral health professionals.
- Provide assistance to help recruit, train, and retain first responders. Support continued federal funding for programs such as Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS), Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER), and Justice Assistance Grants (JAG). Support additional resources for Peer Support professionals and alternative response models through Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) grants.
- Provide direct funding to cities to support violence prevention, including gun violence prevention, programs.
- Support changes to federal banking regulation to allow for access to banking for state licensed cannabis businesses to address safety concerns.
- Support programs to help alleviate poverty in our communities including more utility assistance for low-income households and removing the marriage penalty for individuals receiving disability payments.
- Support efforts to ensure all of community members feel safe and protected by certifying the Equal Rights Act and passing the Equality Act for LGBTQ individuals.
- In order to support the vitality of our local economies we encourage the federal government to address immigration holistically in a way that recognizes the needs of our state and local economies. We look to the federal government to provide coordination and resources to ensure that providing support for immigration doesn't create a financial strain on cities. Additionally, we encourage the federal government to streamline the ability for individuals to be able to more quickly participate in and contribute to local economies. Cities should be included in conversations around immigration and the impacts on our communities.

Invest in transportation

- Support a more sustainable revenue model to fund the Highway Trust Fund – one that provides adequate resources to meet the demand required to maintain and improve our aging transportation infrastructure.
- Support federal policies that provide direct funding and enhance municipal efforts to provide essential transportation systems including but not limited to electrification infrastructure, transit, multimodal, and traffic safety investments and improvements, with a focus on communities of color and other underserved populations.
- Continue to make funding available for fish passage improvement requirements for both state and local governments.
- Support efforts and increase resources to improve traffic and pedestrian safety including additional measures on overweight vehicles and vehicle safety.
- Continue support for investments in rail safety.

Invest in affordable housing and emergency shelter

- Support a comprehensive federal housing policy that preserves local decision making while making substantial efforts to enhance federal investments in affordable housing that will benefit cities, including but not limited to expansions of the low-income housing tax credit (LIHTC), direct capital investments, expanded access to rental assistance and homeownership opportunities including more first-time buyer programs, enhancements to the housing choice voucher program and other efforts to build and preserve affordable housing supply in cities. Without substantial federal investment and technical assistance across all aspects of affordable housing needs, Washington's cities will not be able to solve this crisis.
- Take federal action to limit price fixing in the housing industry that creates unfair market conditions and drives up costs to renters and homebuyers.
- Support expanding federal flexibility for the use of Medicaid funding to provide housing and shelter and to pay for in home health care services to better help individuals stay in housing.

Invest in early learning and childcare

- 63% of Washingtonians live in a “childcare desert” meaning a census tract that contains either no childcare providers or has more than three times as many children as there are spots in a licensed childcare. Even when childcare is available, it is often unaffordable. The average cost in Washington state to send a toddler to childcare is more than \$14,000 annually, which is nearly 40% of the median income for single mothers and 12% of the median income for a married couple. The federal government should partner with states and local communities to provide sufficient resources to support families and ensure that high-quality, safe, and affordable childcare is available. To achieve this, Washington cities support federal funding to replace the now-expired Child Care Stabilization Act dollars, expand the childcare tax credit, and for programs to expand capacity and access to childcare with additional subsidies and well as support for workforce, training, and facilities.

Protect local control over public rights-of-way

- Uphold local control over local public rights-of-way to balance community interests with the need for new telecommunications infrastructure. This includes the:
 - Ability to regulate access to municipally owned poles and other public facilities;
 - Authority for permitting and siting processes that consider community safety, existing infrastructure assets, aesthetics, and other concerns; and
 - Ability to negotiate our own franchise agreements with cable companies.

Protect local fiscal sustainability and regulatory efforts

- Preserve the tax exemption on all municipal bonds, including Private Activity Bonds (PABs); eliminate the \$10,000 cap on the State and Local Tax (SALT) deduction; and restore the tax exemption for advance refunding bonds. By restoring this essential tax exemption, cities would be able to refinance their debts to achieve lower interest rates, saving local taxpayer dollars and freeing up capital for additional infrastructure investments.
- Preserve and expand the Community Development Block Grant program.
- Continue to find opportunities to provide direct flexible funding to cities and towns. Washington communities saw significant benefit from the direct flexible funding made to cities and towns in response to the pandemic and would like the federal government to replicate that model.
- Expand the public service loan forgiveness program to make it easier for public sector employees to use the program and expand the program to include areas with workforce shortages that are critical to providing public services including workers contracted by a state and local government.

Support the National League of Cities’ National Municipal Policy and Resolutions and the priorities of the US Conference of Mayors

- AWC and many individual cities are members and supporters of the NLC agenda. Please support the recommendations of NLC and the US Conference of Mayors if you have not otherwise heard specific feedback from Washington’s cities and towns.