

County Continuity of Operations

Over the course of 19 weeks WACO convened a meeting of elected county officials to identify the barriers to continuity of operations caused by statute that does not consider the challenges posed by pandemic. Based on these conversations, members identified needed updates in statute to modify and update provision of county services, as well as allow operational flexibility during crises beyond those existing in current statute.

Sustainable Policies, Sustainable Counties

Counties provide constitutionally and statutorily directed state services to all of Washington's residents. The Washington Association of County Officials (WACO) is working to secure clear and sustainable policies to provide all 39 counties with the foundation to provide sustainable service levels to every Washingtonian. Our elected county officials provide direct services to citizens in support of their health, safety and financial well-being.

The current crisis has necessitated many exemptions/waivers from current RCW to enable county officials to carry out their responsibilities in statute. A series of gubernatorial proclamations have been helpful, but in many cases have been untimely in establishment and renewal, leaving counties uncertain and/or preparing for multiple contingencies. Changes in RCW that support continued operations, triggered by clear definition of public health crisis and other emergencies, are needed.

WACO is seeking the following changes to statute in order to maintain vital county services during a public health crisis:

- Align County Assessor property inspection language to allow for use of new technologies while upholding national (IAAO) standards.
- Permit the State Auditor to allow local governments a 30-day extension for filing annual fiscal reports if Governor has declared an emergency.
- Provide that a County Auditor has fulfilled their obligation of making public records available if records can be accessed on the County Auditor's website.
- Clarify the definition of "attend" in regard to County Clerk courtroom attendance to include virtual attendance.
- Expand the membership of state Emergency Management Council to include County Coroners and Medical Examiners; and add Coroners and Medical Examiners to the definition of "first responders".
- Grant Coroners and Medical Examiners access to driver's license and State issued identification cards for the purposes of identification of the deceased.
- Allow County Sheriffs to conduct their public auctions online, similar to public auctions conducted by County Treasurers.
- Align timelines for personal and real property tax collections resulting in both efficiencies for County Treasurers offices and relief for small business owners.

County Auditors

Abolish Torrens

It's time to abolish Torrens; an outdated, labor-intensive, system of land registration separate from standard recording systems. The system requires a judicial component that creates an unnecessarily confusing and time-consuming burden for applicants and county offices alike. Only five counties currently allow Torrens (King, Pierce, Snohomish, Island, and Kitsap). By abolishing Torrens Washington would have a standardized system of land registration.

Standardize Recording Practices **SB 5019**

Recording standards and practice vary from county to county creating confusion and liability. The Secretary of State needs authority to adopt rules to standardize county recording practices. The Auditors propose a commission composed of County Auditors, Assessors, Treasurers and other stakeholders to develop and maintain consistent standards through the rule making process.

County Clerks

Better Alignment of Duties in the Recall Process **SB 5131**

The roles of County Clerk and the court during the recall process are misaligned. Currently, County Clerks are required to post a hearing notice for the recall process, while judges currently set the actual hearing dates and certify their judgment documents. The proposed legislation would transfer the role of posting a hearing notice to the judges, to create a more efficient system, while moving the certification of the documents to the County Clerk to align with the practices of other court proceedings and the statutory purpose of the County Clerk.

Allow Counties to Raise Ex Parte Filing Fees

Due to increased ex parte filings since the Covid-19 outbreak, County Clerk offices are seeing significant increases in staff time and resources for this purpose. Counties need the option to raise the ex parte filing fee from \$30 up to \$50. The ex parte system is commonly used by legal professionals, who appreciate the service as it saves their clients time and money. A fee increase for this service would not affect the general public since there are other options in most counties to have documents signed. The filing fee has not increased since 2009.



County Coroners

Mandate National Certification for Elected or Appointed Coroners and Medical Examiners

All elected Coroners and Medical Examiners in counties greater than 40,000 people should be required to achieve national certification within 24 months of taking office. Funding to meet this requirement already exists and is currently available to take the training, or as a reimbursement for testing costs for those who have taken training elsewhere.

Fix the Autopsy Reimbursement Rate Gap

When the legislature raised the reimbursement rate for Coroner counties, Medical Examiner counties were left out of the amended language. This proposal would fix this inadvertent omission and raise their reimbursement rate from 25% to 30%. Funding for the reimbursement already exists in the Death Investigations Account.

County Prosecutors

Adopt the Peeler Fix SB 5118

A change in RCW is needed to avoid dismissal of cases when a defendant is charged in multiple counties with multiple crimes and claims the right to a speedy trial in multiple counties at the same time. Additionally, the change is needed to avoid costly transport of defendants between multiple counties for multiple cases occurring at the same time. The proposed fix excludes the time a defendant spends in jail awaiting trial from the speedy trial time of another county, solving the problem created by the courts in the State V. Peeler case

