

## 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 membership of the Washington Association of County Officials (WACO) includes elected county assessors, auditors, clerks, coroners and medical examiners, prosecuting attorneys, sheriffs, treasurers and comparable appointed officials in charter counties.

### HB 1241 – ADDRESSING HARASSMENT OF ELECTIONS OFFICIALS

The last few years have put a sharp focus on the importance of safety for election workers. Election officials have received threats of violence which impacts the ability of local election offices to retain and recruit. This may lead to lack of experience in election procedures, which could threaten free and fair elections. County Auditors are dedicated to working with the legislature to continue strengthening laws protecting election officials. The legislature should send a clear message: harassment is unacceptable, threatens our democracy, and risks safety and peace of mind for election officials and their families.

### HB 1272 – CONSISTENCY IN STANDARDS FOR VOTER PAMPHLETS

Lack of uniform standards for state and local voters' pamphlets causes confusion for candidates and campaigns. Legislative candidates whose districts cross county borders would benefit from consistent rules across counties. County Auditors and WACO members request legislation to relate consistent standards and practices across counties and at the state level ensuring accurate and relevant information in voters' pamphlets.

### ADDRESS THE WSP TOXICOLOGY LAB BACKLOG

The number of Coroner and Medical Examiner cases requiring toxicological analysis continues to grow each year. In addition, there is a higher need for analysis of all synthetic illicit drugs, which the WSP State Toxicology Lab does not have the equipment to test for. These requisitions are forwarded from the WSP State Toxicology Lab to a national toxicology lab (NMS) to process and then sent back to WSP tox lab for final review.

The average processing time for a case takes on average 90 days, which affects the ability for the Coroner and Medical Examiner Offices to determine the cause and manner of death. Law enforcement and the Prosecuting Attorney's rely on the Coroner and Medical Examiner's findings to assist in their work. This delay in results impacts the ability for a case to be successfully prosecuted. WACME would like to request that the WSP Toxicology Lab be provided the equipment and funding necessary to handle the caseload and improve the turnaround time for results.

## SB 5523 – STUDY STATEWIDE FORENSIC PATHOLOGIST SHORTAGE

The nation currently is in the grips of a shortage of forensic pathologists. With fewer than 500 in the country, our counties struggle to find pathologists to complete the important autopsy work while ensuring that available pathologists do not exceed federal limits to the number of autopsies one can conduct in a year.

County Coroner/MEs seek legislation to direct the Washington Association of County Officials to conduct a study on the state's forensic pathologist shortage, and develop potential policy initiatives that would attract and retain board certified Forensic Pathologists.

## HB 1419 – MODERNIZE THE PROCESS OF REGISTERED WARRANTS

A registered warrant is an order to pay issued by the Auditor to the Treasurer to give to the payee money from the County Treasury. Current RCW is outdated and cumbersome, reflecting paper-based, signature-dependent processes that have been replaced by electronic systems. In addition to amending the language to reflect updates in practice, the proposed legislation provides a means for issuing warrants where there are insufficient funds; and updates the language to provide for current practices and making the process less cumbersome.

## SB 5392 – REINSTATING OVERPAYMENT REFUND THRESHOLD

2022 Uniform Unclaimed Property Act was a lengthy, major reform bill. Among its many provisions was an unintentional elimination of a \$10 minimum threshold for refunding overpayments made to the court. This is problematic and costly because issuance of a refund check costs the Clerks office roughly \$7, in addition to the labor cost related to issuance/tracking.

## HB 1205 – BETTER ALIGNMENT OF DUTIES IN THE DEPENDENCY CASES

Nearly 30 years ago the state removed the responsibility for dependency and termination of parent-child relationship from counties to allow for greater coordination of services and standardization across the State of Washington. In doing so the state took over all but one aspect of dependency actions - publication notification. This created a system in which counties carry the cost of publication, and are now divorced of the actions which they are posting notice for; leading to opportunity for errors in notification in an otherwise unified dependency system.

County Clerks seek legislation better aligning dependency case announcements with the dependency process by directing the State to perform the publication of notice of uncontacted parents in dependency and parental rights termination matters in all courts, as it currently does in some counties by agreement.