

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 1004 – UPDATING THE PERSONAL PROPERTY TAX THRESHOLD

RCW has long provided relief for small businesses by exempting the first \$15,000 in personal property from taxation, but this was established many years ago and no longer provides the intended relief. As a result, the purchase of one piece of equipment can mean a small business owner transitions from exempt to owing personal property taxes. For smaller businesses, the administrative cost of reporting is often higher than the tax owed, and for County Assessors the administrative cost for small accounts is greater than the tax revenue.

By updating the outdated personal property tax threshold from \$15,000 to \$50,000 to help small businesses and eliminate unnecessary administrative cost and burden for county assessors.

HB 1044 – UPDATING THE REET TECHNOLOGY FEE

In 2013 the Legislature established a fee accompanying collection of Real Estate Excise Tax (REET) to be used to help cover the cost of software and operations of County Assessors and Treasurers charged by the state with implementing the tax. This fee has not increased in twelve years despite ongoing needs and rising costs related to software and administration. To maintain this program, this fee needs to catch up and keep up with cost of administration and ensure the fee is directed to the offices that administer this tax.

We propose an increase the current REET fee from \$5 to \$20 and direct that these REET funds be deposited 65% into the Assessor Fund and 35% into the Treasurer Fund. For future increases we propose the establishment in RCW of an inflator for these funds, such as CPI, every four years.

This proposal aligns legislative intent with local practice and helps relieve pressure of competition for limited local general funds while maintaining program integrity.

SB 5221 – EQUITY AND UPDATES – PERSONAL PROPERTY DELINQUENCY AND DISTRAINT

Some requirements in RCW related to personal property distraint are outdated, resulting in more administrative cost than tax revenue and providing unnecessary hardship for struggling taxpayers. The legislature in recent years has improved the timelines and requirements for real property foreclosure as part of larger efforts to bring relief to struggling homeowners and bring cost-effective changes to administration. Personal property taxpayers, in particular mobile homeowners and small businesses are in need of these improvements as well.

This proposal gives County Treasurers an option to waive collection of delinquent property tax when cost of collection exceeds amount due, eliminates the unnecessary 3-year waiting period for title for new owners of mobile homes obtained through distraint sale, and align the distraint timeline with foreclosure timeline in the management of excess proceeds.

This bill makes common sense updates that benefit both tax revenue and taxpayers.

SB 5021 – ALIGNMENT OF COURT EXHIBIT RETENTION SCHEDULES

RCW authorizes the County Clerk to apply to the court for an order authorizing exhibit destruction at any time more than six years after entry of the final judgment. However, in the 2024 new RCW was create that requires that certain exhibits be destroyed five years after the final judgment. This creates different retention requirements within the same case type and the different requirements creates the possibility of confusion and errors in exhibit retention and destruction. This is not an efficient or effective use of resources in systems that are already stretched beyond capacity; and creates the possibility of confusion and errors in exhibit retention and management.

County Clerks are seeking to align the two retention schedules by lowering the standard retention to five years to match the schedule amended in 2024.

HB 1002 – PTSD SERVICES FOR MEDICAL DEATH INVESTIGATION AND PATHOLOGY STAFF

Current RCW defines certain mental health or disability conditions as an occupational disease for firefighters, law enforcement, and nurses. Every day, County Coroner and Medical Examiner investigation and pathology staff work on the very same cases that help trigger PTSD related conditions, yet these staff are not afforded the same occupational protections as their peers in the field.

Coroner/ME investigative and pathology staff must be able to access the same occupational services as their colleagues in the field to help prevent burn out, compounded mental health issues, and ongoing effects of PTSD.

HB 1042 – ENSURING CONTINUITY OF COUNTY TREASURERS SERVICES

One major function of the County Treasurer is to provide billing, collection, and disbursement of property taxes for all public taxing entities in the county. Over time, this has resulted in roughly 60% of the workload of the county treasurer providing services free-of-cost to entities other than the county.

RCW allows County Treasurers to assess a modest fee on special purpose districts/special assessments but has no such provision for services provided to taxing districts (e.g. cities, ports, school, fire and hospital districts, and the state). This has resulted in growing inequity in who is paying for and receiving services, and inadequate and unstable funds for key Treasurer's office functions and staffing.

To support and ensure continuity in services from local collection through the state revenue system, County Treasurers are seeking collaboration and support from the state and local taxing districts in identifying means for County Treasurer's operations to be more self-sustaining.

We propose the County Treasurer recover allowable prior year actual costs on a pro rata basis from each billable levy for actual real and personal property. To mitigate the impact on smaller taxing districts, the first \$50,000 of the district's levy amount shall be excluded from the cost recovery.

SB 5069 – STATE PRINTING OF PRIMARY VOTERS PAMPHLETS

Currently the state is required to produce a voters' pamphlet for general elections, but not for the primary elections in even- numbered years. While counties may choose to do so themselves and bill the state for their portion of a locally-produced pamphlet, the result is that the information received by voters varies by county, and the cost of to counties is collectively higher than if centrally produced and distributed at the state level.

Voters expect and rely upon the information provided in voter pamphlets. Having information on state-level candidates in primary elections should not differ depending on county. This proposal will result in equity of information received by voters and a more cost-effective means of getting it to them.



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