



2021 Legislative Agenda

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Increasing Equitable Access to Healthcare

The ASWWU recognizes the right to equitable access to affordable health services among all communities, on and off WWU's campus. Marginalized communities particularly, BIPOC, LGBTQ+, and disabled communities are disproportionately likely to experience adverse health outcomes. Additionally, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has placed further pressure on many people within these communities. Regardless of race, immigration status, economic status, and pre-existing conditions, the health needs for all communities must be proactively addressed. These communities are not given the proper resources to meet their individual and varying needs, leaving many with improper access to healthcare services. Not only should services be affordable, but they must also be readily available for everyone to ensure the safety and health of individuals. Disparities across healthcare and historically underrepresented communities has created a climate of mistrust that can deter people from accessing medical care because they fear discrimination and stigma. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have identified inequities in social determinants of health, such as socioeconomic status and access to healthcare, as factors that contribute to lesser quality of healthcare for underrepresented communities.

The ASWWU strongly believes in the right to a safe abortion for all and student health plans vary and access to abortion is not guaranteed to be covered. Health carriers for student health plans are not required by law to cover abortions, which leaves many students unable to safely and affordably access crucial healthcare. Pregnant individuals must have the proper information on all their options and have their choice be respected.

THE ASWWU STRONGLY ADVOCATES THE WASHINGTON STATE LEGISLATURE TO

- Support [SB 5052](#) which will lead to the creation of health equity zones and to ensure that communities all across Washington state meet their health needs.
- To pass [HB 1009](#), which would help ensure that services like abortion are available for students and information on access to such services are made readily available by all healthcare providers.
- Support [SB 5228](#) to create a curriculum on health equity to teach attitudes, knowledge, and skills that will enable students in the medical professions to care for patients of diverse communities. However, we ask that this legislation be broadened to include other postsecondary health and wellness educational programs in Washington State. These would include nursing (RN-BSN), public health, and behavioral and mental health.
- ASWWU also supports the complementary [SB 5229](#) relating to health equity continuing education for health care professionals every four years.
- Support [HB 1149](#) that proposes to create health literacy programs for students grades 9-12 to be implemented in the 2022-2023 school year.
- Support [SB 5204](#) that would create the Whole Washington Health Trust that would allow all Washington state residents the opportunity to enroll in nonprofit health insurance coverage, which would include medical, vision, and dental insurance, along with prescription drug benefits.
- Support [SB 5313](#) concerning health insurance discrimination which would prevent health insurance discrimination against LGBTQ+, with specific protection being put in place to prevent health insurance companies from rejecting coverage under the pretense that gender affirming surgeries or procedures were merely cosmetic or medically unnecessary.
- Support [SB 5209](#) and companion [HB 1182](#) which will engage and expand behavioral health and suicide prevention crisis response services, including telephone services, which have become more widely used during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Make Juneteenth a Legal Holiday

The ASWWU recognizes June 19th as a significant holiday commonly known as Juneteenth that must be recognized by all persons. The lack of knowledge of Black struggles and Black history must be addressed. Therefore, while striving to make Juneteenth a legal holiday and taking a step towards recognizing this important date, there must be more work towards ensuring that Black history is accurately represented and that the holidays that commemorate these milestones are created with Black communities in mind. We ask that further action be taken to ensure that Black communities can properly celebrate these holidays rather than still having to work through them.

THE ASWWU STRONGLY ADVOCATES THE WASHINGTON STATE LEGISLATURE TO

- Support the passage of [HB 1016](#) which would make Juneteenth a legal holiday.

Equitable Living and Housing

The ASWWU recognizes the economic challenges faced by individuals in Washington state and with COVID-19 reaching its one-year mark, these economic challenges have been further amplified. The struggle faced by many Washingtonians and college students to pay off bills and meet monthly expenses has been around before the pandemic.

THE ASWWU STRONGLY ADVOCATES THE WASHINGTON STATE LEGISLATURE TO

- Pass [SB 5007](#), which addresses economic challenges from the COVID-19 pandemic by reducing cost on electric utilities and providing aid to low-income customers.
- Support [SB 5012](#) that provides a local government option for the funding of essential affordable housing programs.
- Support [SB 5241](#) that will implement local economic grant programs that promote equity and economic inclusion for people experiencing poverty, with a particular focus on people of color and people in rural communities, through the coordination of existing community programs and resources.

Increase Accessibility in Public Spaces

Accessibility in public spaces, both virtual and in-person, is one of the most basic measures to produce equitable outcomes for members of our community who are disabled, and oftentimes it requires very little work or fiscal contribution. By providing public accommodations, we can reduce the undue burden of accessibility barriers which inherently create inequitable outcomes and put disabled peoples at a disadvantage.

THE ASWWU STRONGLY ADVOCATES THE WASHINGTON STATE LEGISLATURE TO

- Support [SB 5027](#) that will require closed captioning on televisions in places of public accommodation. The introduction of closed captioning in public spaces helps to include not only those who are Deaf or hard of hearing, but also those who are neurodivergent and may have auditory processing disorders.
- Increase enforcement of [Policy 188 from the State Office of the Chief Information Officer](#) **Accessibility**- Policy 188 is established for virtual accessibility for any state sanctioned resources. Currently, this has very little enforcement, and given that much of our lifestyles are virtual and remote, there needs to be comprehensive implementation of this policy, as well as penalties.

Supporting Student's Basic Needs

ASWWU greatly appreciates the passing of the [Workforce Education Investment Act](#), during the 2019 legislative session, that expanded the Washington College Grant (formally known as the State Need Grant). This allows students whose families make around \$50,000 or less a year to receive close to full-tuition scholarship to public colleges and universities, while families who make up 100% of the Median Family Income (\$88,000 for a family of four) may receive partial full-tuition scholarship or aid. This expansion granted aid to over 110,000 students in 2020, compared to just 92,000 students in 2019. While students and families are now better positioned to afford higher education, tuition does not capture the entire cost of attendance or address accessibility issues that keep students from succeeding in higher education. With the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, issues of housing and food insecurity have only increased nationwide.

THE ASWWU STRONGLY ADVOCATES THE WASHINGTON STATE LEGISLATURE TO

- Protect and increase existing financial aid programs such as the Washington College Grant, and other financial aid investments made by the Washington Workforce Education Investment Act.
- Revise legislation regarding financial aid to acknowledge that unexpected job losses, unstable housing as a result of COVID-19, and differential access to public benefits programs are not considered by FAFSA and that data on student's current FAFSA may not be helpful in addressing current needs.
- Create a grant program that is sustainable and can be accessed by all public Washington state universities and colleges to fund and assist with programs that are addressing basic needs and insecurities (food pantries, housing assistance for students who are experiencing homelessness, clothing assistance).
- Support [SB 5070](#) that requires public K-12 schools and institutions of higher education to make menstrual hygiene products free and available. We ask that there be an amendment to ensure that they are dispersed campus wide. We also ask that this become financially mandated by the Washington state operating budget.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) and anti-racism training in higher education are inexorably linked to students and staff, of all backgrounds, and their academic and professional success. The surge in DEI and anti-racism commitments over the past summer following the historic Black Lives Matter protests across the country, provides an opportunity for legislatures to prioritize legislation that supports, protects, and brings equity to historically underrepresented students.

THE ASWWU STRONGLY ADVOCATES THE WASHINGTON STATE LEGISLATURE TO

- Support of [SB 5227](#) that requires DEI and anti-racism training and professional training to students, staff and faculty of higher education institutions. This bill is unique in that it emphasizes the importance of requiring DEI and anti-racism training for staff and faculty in higher education. We encourage the language of the bill to include the addition of administrative positions to also receive DEI and anti-racism training. **SB 5227** must take into consideration the unique composition of students, faculty, and staff of each institution of higher education in the creation and implementation of the DEI and anti-racism training and subsequent work.
- Work with the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) to allocate funds to pay and compensate the students in the student achievement council who are a part of the DEI programming committees outlined in **Section Four of SB 5227**.
- Center student experiences in legislation that concerns DEI and anti-racism programs in higher education. In order to effectively educate about marginalized peoples, said peoples must be centered throughout the entire creation and implementation of diversity, equity, and inclusion training and programs in higher education.

Creating Successful and Stable Futures for Foster Youth with Disabilities

Today's competitive job market increasingly requires postsecondary degrees or certifications. A recent report by The Business-Higher Education Forum (BHEF) estimates that 85% of current jobs and 90% of the fastest and best paying jobs now require postsecondary education credentials. Attaining these credentials involves significant socioeconomic resources. Washington state students who are experiencing unstable living conditions, specifically those who are under the age of 21, in the foster care system, and/or are experiencing homelessness, face increased obstacles and lack of resources. Those who are most vulnerable to receiving less quality attention and resources are college-age youth in prisons, foster care, or are homeless who have mental, developmental, emotional, learning, and physical disabilities.

THE ASWWU STRONGLY ADVOCATES THE WASHINGTON STATE LEGISLATURE TO

- Support **HB 1061** that will combine the efforts of the Department of Social and Health Services, Behavioral Health Administration, the Developmental Disabilities Administration, and other related services in developing a transition plan to meet the needs of youth with disabilities transition into adulthood. This transition plan will help reduce the number of foster youths with disabilities being inappropriately discharged into hospitals, or further unstable living conditions, without any possibility of accessing resources for postsecondary credentials.
- Prioritize foster youth with disabilities with health waivers in the Developmental Disabilities Administration [waitlist](#).
- Encourage the use of State Operated Living Alternatives (SOLAs) for foster youth to decrease unstable living situations and disruption to way of life by having them remain in their communities.

Supporting Our Undocumented Community and Mixed Status Families at WWU and in Washington State

ASWWU appreciates the approval of **SB 6561** during the 2019-2020 legislative session that allows undocumented students to apply for state-sponsored loans for tuition. However, it should be recognized that throughout a student's time in higher education, there will always be unexpected fees and costs. Lack of support and availability of resources, especially for healthcare, can lead to physical and mental health challenges, poor academic performance, and low retention rates. In addition to supporting undocumented students in higher education and career goals, we find it important to encompass and support the undocumented community as a whole.

THE ASWWU STRONGLY ADVOCATES THE WASHINGTON STATE LEGISLATURE TO

- Support **HB 1191** that will expand healthcare options to include undocumented individuals and international students in Washington state.
- Create a budget provision to provide a one-time \$1,200 stipend to students who filled out the Washington Application for State Financial Aid (WAFSA). This stipend will help support individuals who were ineligible to receive aid from the federal CARES act, or the federal stimulus checks.
- Revoking the business license of the GEO group currently managing the Northwest Immigration Detention Center in Tacoma, the one remaining private prison in Washington state. This recommendation is based on its [history of human rights violations, poor physical conditions, hunger strikes, and deaths](#).
- Support **HB 1090** which relates to banning private, for-profit prisons in Washington state, and expand the ban to also include transitional facilities and private, for-profit immigration detention centers under ICE jurisdiction.