

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.

Therefore, the ASWWU asks that the legislature:

- 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.
- Support **Senate Bill 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.
- Create a grant program that is sustainable and can be accessed by all public Washington state universities 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 **Senate Bill 5070** that requires public K-12 education and higher education institutions to make menstrual hygiene products free and available in all campus wide restrooms by the 2022-2023 academic year. We also ask this bill become financially mandated by the Washington state government.

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.

Therefore, the ASWWU asks that the legislature:

- Support **House Bill 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.

Ensuring Equity in Healthcare

This past year health inequities have come into a sharper focus as a result of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. 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. Addressing health inequities will lead to positive health outcomes and healthier communities.

Therefore, the ASWWU asks that the legislature:

- Support **Senate Bill 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 **Senate Bill 5229** relating to health equity continuing education for health care professionals every four years.
- Support **House Bill 1149** that proposes to create health literacy programs for students grades 9-12 to be implemented in the 2022-2023 school year.

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.

Therefore, ASWWU strongly advocates legislatures to

- Support of **Senate Bill 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. Senate Bill 5227 must take into consideration the unique composition of student, 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 Senate Bill 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 trainings and programs in higher education.

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

ASWWU appreciates the approval of **Senate Bill 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 their high education and career goals, we find it important to encompass and support the undocumented community.

Therefore, the ASWWU asks that the legislature to:

- **Support House Bill 1191** that will expand healthcare options to include undocumented individuals and international students in Washington state.
- Creating 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 check.
- 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 **House Bill 1090** which relates to banning private, for-profit prisons in Washington state, but expand the ban to also include private, for-profit immigration detention centers and transitional facilities.