



# 2022 Legislative Agenda

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# Centering Equity at Western Washington University

The Associated Students of Western Washington University plans to center equity in each issue area of our 2022 ASWWU Legislative Agenda. Our agenda seeks to promote student-identified and community-driven initiatives to guide our advocacy efforts when speaking with Washington state legislators and other state leaders and stakeholders in higher education. The ASWWU recognizes that all students deserve to feel safe and supported throughout their higher education journeys. Our campus must do more to create environments that are accessible, safe, and inclusive for all students. In order to meet these goals, it is instrumental that we work to center equity in each of our issue areas.

The ASWWU recognizes that students have often championed and led discussions in the advancement of students' needs and rights; however, this work should not rely entirely on the labor and efforts of students. Our university, state, and the wider community must also work to ensure that students are supported through equitable funding, resources, and programming. The ASWWU requests that the Legislature address the many barriers that prevent students from enrolling in and completing their education and achieving their goals. This must include support for BIPOC students, LGBTQ+ students, students with disabilities, undocumented students, and other historically underrepresented students in higher education.

The ASWWU is in support of Washington Roundtable's goal of 70% of Washington high school graduates earning a post-secondary credential by 2030. In order to meet this goal, the Legislature, university, and wider community must commit to centering equity on our campus. ASWWU commits to centering equity, and this commitment is reflected in the following issue areas and legislative priorities.

# Meeting Basic Needs

The ASWWU recognizes that addressing basic needs insecurity amongst students at Western and other public higher education institutions in the state is incredibly important in supporting students. Ensuring that students are able to access basic needs, including quality housing and healthy food options, will help assist students in achieving their educational goals. Securing students' basic needs also aligns with the Washington Roundtable's goal of 70% of Washington high school graduates pursuing additional education and training. Meeting students' basic needs is the first step in assisting students in meeting their goals.

## **THE ASWWU STRONGLY ADVOCATES THAT THE WASHINGTON STATE LEGISLATURE PASS THE WWU, CWU, EWU, AND EVERGREEN \$5.2 MILLION JOINT OPERATING BUDGET REQUEST.**

- Western Washington University's \$2.1 million portion of the budget request designates funding to expand 'Retention and Academic Success' services for WWU students. This funding would allow the university to increase support for former foster youth and students experiencing homelessness. Passing this budget request will ensure that services are offered to help support students in the completion and continuance of their education.
- The 'Retention and Academic Success' portion also seeks to secure increased funding for financial aid counseling. This would help ensure that students are aware of the programs and resources they can benefit from. Increasing access to financial aid counseling is instrumental in assisting students in accessing support.

## **THE ASWWU STRONGLY ADVOCATES FOR THE PASSAGE OF HB 1601 (2022) AND THE GOVERNOR'S BUDGET FUNDING [PG 44] TO EXPAND THE HOUSELESS STUDENT SUPPORT PILOT PROGRAM FOR COMMUNITY AND TECHNICAL COLLEGE STUDENTS, AS WELL AS UNIVERSITY STUDENTS.**

- The ASWWU believes that all students should have access to safe, permanent housing while pursuing their education. The Homeless Student Support pilot program established in SB 5800 (2019) has assisted many students experiencing homelessness by providing basic necessities and other resources.
- The program initially sought to support four community and technical colleges and two universities, including Western Washington University. More recently, HB 1166 (2021) expanded the pilot program to support six more institutions. So far, the program has helped support over 500 students across Washington; however, there is need amongst many more students. By expanding the program, a much higher number of institutions and students could be assisted.



- Thus far, the program has provided emergency housing and homeless prevention services, food assistance, case management and referrals, showers and hygiene products, transportation, and access to technology.
- When students have access to basic needs, including access to laundry facilities, housing, technology, and food, they are better equipped to pursue and complete their education. The ASWWU would like to see these services expanded to all public higher education institutions in Washington state.

**THE ASWWU STRONGLY ADVOCATES FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A BIENNIAL BASIC NEEDS SURVEY MODELED AFTER HB 1893 (2019) THAT WOULD COLLECT DATA REGARDING FOOD AND HOUSING INSECURITIES, AND WOULD PROVIDE STUDENTS WITH NEED-BASED AND EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE FUNDS ON A GRANT BASIS.**

- Food and housing insecurity are prevalent amongst Western students and students across the state; however, the specific extent to which basic needs insecurity impacts students needs to be quantified in order to be addressed. HB 1893 (2019) targeted investments in Washington’s community and technical colleges students, and we seek the creation of a similar assistance program be established for university students with the resources they need to succeed and achieve their educational goals. We ask that a Student Emergency Assitance Grant program be established at four-year universities.
- To apply for funding for their students, CTC institutions are required to collect and provide specific, up-to-date data regarding how many of their students experience food and housing insecurity. We ask that universities be required to do the same.
- In efforts to increase transparency, ensure targeted use of funds, and strengthen student advocacy, we ask that collected data be made accessible to students and the public. Access to this data will also allow the legislature and other leaders in higher education to make targeted investments in student success in the future.

**THE ASWWU STRONGLY ADVOCATES FOR THE EXPANSION OF THE WORKING CONNECTIONS CHILD CARE PROGRAM TO INCLUDE UNIVERSITY UNDERGRADUATE AND GRADUATE STUDENTS.**

- In 2021, HB 1213 (2021) expanded the Working Connections Child Care program to include community, technical, and tribal colleges. Qualifying students at these Washington state institutions are able to receive child care subsidy programs through this program.
- For student parents, affordable childcare is necessary to support them in completing their education. Currently, if community and technical college students graduate from their institution and continue their education at a university, they face a benefits cliff, as university students are not eligible for this program.
- The ASWWU supports the expansion of the Working Connections Child Care program to help support undergraduate and graduate student parents.

**THE ASWWU STRONGLY ADVOCATES FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF BENEFITS NAVIGATOR POSITIONS AT ALL PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS TO ENSURE THAT STUDENTS ARE ABLE TO UNDERSTAND AND ACCESS FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS.**

- Washington offers a variety of financial support to students in the state; however, navigating these financial aid offers and programs can be difficult, especially for low-income and first-generation college students.
- In 2021, Oregon State's Legislature passed [HB 2835](#) which "requires each community college and public university to hire benefits navigator to assist students in determining eligibility for federal, state, and local benefits programs". This will help to guarantee that students are aware of all programs and benefits that they are eligible for.
- Currently, students at Western must initiate contact with a variety of decentralized offices and clinics to receive help accessing financial benefits and programs. Students are often unaware of the various services that they qualify for; therefore, it is important that there is a more central position or resource center that engages in student outreach and education on these benefits.
- Modeling a bill after Oregon's HB 2835 would help ensure that students across the state have access to the many benefits Washington state offers to students. This would help connect current and prospective with financial aid notices and information. Students should be directed to SNAP benefits, TANF, Apple Health Care Coverage, Working Connections Child Care, WAFSA, and other, relevant aid resources. By simplifying student aid awards, students will be better equipped to navigate the financial aid process and develop plans for their futures.

# Financial Aid & College Affordability

The rate of tuition and fee increases across Washington state are barriers to students seeking to obtain a higher education degree or credential. The ASWWU is committed to ensuring college affordability in efforts to increase college completion rates and retention, while also reducing debt imposed on college graduates. Working to ensure that college aid is distributed equitably is also key to increasing higher education enrollment, retention, and completion. Students should have access to reasonable financing plans to help assist them in covering the costs of tuition and fees.

**THE ASWWU STRONGLY ADVOCATES FOR THE PASSAGE OF [HB 1659 \(2022\)](#) THAT WOULD CREATE “BRIDGE GRANTS” FOR LOW-INCOME STUDENTS, WHILE ALSO FULLY FUNDING THE WASHINGTON COLLEGE FOR STUDENTS WITH STATE MEDIAN FAMILY INCOMES BETWEEN 0%-70%.**

## Creating Bridge Grants

- The Washington College Grant is one of the most generous college financial assistance programs in the country. The Grant assists many Western students in the pursuit of their educational goals. Still, many low-income students at Western, and throughout the state, continue to experience financial insecurities. In Fall 2019, 39% of Western Washington University students were reported as experiencing food insecurity; 49% were reported as experiencing housing insecurity, and 19% were reported as experiencing homelessness.
- These “Bride Grants” would provide students with funds to help cover the costs of non-tuition expenses, such as food, housing, books, child care, and other necessities. The Seattle Promise Equity Scholarship serves as an example that has been successful in the past. Establishing equity grants would help empower and assist low-income students in completing their education.

## Expanding Washington College Grant Awards

- Currently, the Washington College Grant is fully funded for students with a median family income at and below 55%. The Washington College Grant’s sliding scale offers some support to students with higher MFIs; however, funding provided to these students is greatly reduced compared to those at 55% MFI.
- Students with MFIs from 55% to 70% share demonstrated levels of need within Washington state. Fully funding the Washington College Grant for students in this

MFI range, and adjusting the sliding scale, will help to ensure that more students have access to resources they need to pay for their education.

- Working to provide generous financial aid packages to students will ensure that they are empowered and equipped to finance their education without taking on a lifetime of debt.

### **THE ASWWU STRONGLY REQUESTS \$475,000 IN NEW ANNUAL STATE FUNDING TO ADDRESS REGIONAL AND STATEWIDE NEEDS IN THE NURSING WORKFORCE AND DEVELOP WESTERN WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY'S NURSING PROGRAM.**

- Currently, WWU's RN-BSN nursing program is self-sustaining, and nursing students pay more per year to complete the program than other students in other programs at Western Washington University.
- The Governor's Proposed 2022 Supplemental Budget [PG 39] outlines the need to address the shortage of nurses in Washington state, stating that the state must aim to "support low-income students" and "attract new students to nursing". The ASWWU also seeks to ensure that students who wish to become nurses, nurse educators, administrators, and community-based practitioners are able to do so.
- With the funding requested, Western Washington University would be able to expand and boost enrollment of our current RN-to-Bachelors of Science in Nursing (BSN) Program by offering the program at a reduced tuition cost. Transitioning to state funding for our BSN program would save students approximately \$5,000 for the year-long program.
- This funding would also assist in the establishment of a Masters of Science in Nursing (MSN), including an Associate Degree in Nursing (ADN)-to-MSN pathway, with focuses on population health, nursing administration, and nursing education.
- The funding requested would allow Western Washington University to increase access to our nursing education program while, also, expanding programs offered.

### **THE ASWWU STRONGLY ADVOCATES FOR THE PASSAGE OF HB 1687 (2022) THAT WOULD ENHANCE THE WASHINGTON COLLEGE BOUND PROGRAM ACCESS.**

- The Washington College Bound scholarship provides state financial aid to eligible students who enroll in middle school and meet pledge requirements. The scholarship supports students in covering tuition at public college rates, fees, and book allowances. This can be used at over 65 universities, colleges, and technical programs in Washington state.
- This Bill would expand the program by increasing eligibility and supporting a larger number of students who demonstrate an interest in enrolling in post-secondary education following high school graduation. This Bill specifically seeks to increase enrollment at community and technical colleges throughout the state.



- The ASWWU supports efforts to increase access to education in a variety of forms, including community and technical college enrollment. Additionally, many Western students enter as transfer students from community and technical colleges. We acknowledge and support aid that would help assist more students in the completion of their educational goals.


### **THE ASWWU STRONGLY ADVOCATES FOR THE PASSAGE OF HB 1736 (2022) TO ESTABLISH A WASHINGTON STATE STUDENT LOAN PROGRAM.**

- In Washington, it is estimated that the average debt owed amongst college graduates averages around \$33,500. College debt has often disproportionately impacted low-income individuals, first-generation students, and people of color.
- Oftentimes, high interest rates accumulate and negatively impact individuals' abilities to save money and contribute to the state's economy post-graduation. There are also limited financial assistance for Washington state graduate students, despite the need to grow our workforce in a variety of sectors.
- HB 1736 (2022) would establish a low-interest loan program for eligible students. Students would be screened, and eligible students would be issued low-interest student loans with tailored repayment programs. This program would be available to students pursuing a certificate, associate's degree, bachelor's degree, or graduate degree.
- The ASWWU supports the establishment and expansion of programs that help finance college tuition, fees, and living expenses for students. This loan program would help increase educational opportunities for many students.

### **THE ASWWU STRONGLY ADVOCATES THAT THE LEGISLATURE PASS HB 1835 (2022) IN RAISING AWARENESS OF THE WASHINGTON COLLEGE GRANT AND INCREASE FAFSA AND WAFSA COMPLETION RATES.**

- One key barrier to college enrollment and completion is a lack of awareness of grant and loan programs available to students. In Washington, there are low FAFSA completion rates despite a multitude of funding programs and resources available.
- Currently, FAFSA completion is necessary for Washington students to secure and receive funding from the Washington College Grant; however, there is limited awareness surrounding the Washington College Grant and how to access it. FAFSA completion is also correlative with higher rates of post-secondary enrollment, retention, and attainment.
- This Bill would establish and fund programs and partnerships that assist in FAFSA completion and raise awareness of the Washington College Grant. Middle and high school outreach programs, college aid counseling, and community partnerships would help ensure that more individuals are aware of aid options and resources.
- The ASWWU believes this is fundamental to increasing college enrollment, access, and completion in Washington state.

**THE ASWWU STRONGLY ADVOCATES THAT THE LEGISLATURE PRIORITIZE INVESTMENTS IN GRADUATE STUDENT SUPPORT AND FINANCIAL AID.**

- The ASWWU values the inclusion and support of students of color, disabled students, and students of other historically marginalized identities in graduate programs across the state. This helps aid in the development of a more diverse workforce. This also ensures that more students of color and other historically underrepresented identities are a part of the growth and expansion of key workforces in Washington state, including education, medical work, and behavioral health careers.
  - The ASWWU asks for the passage of legislation that expands support and resources for Washington state's graduate students.
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# Student Wellness & Behavioral Health

Student health and behavioral support services at Western, and other Washington public universities, lack the funding and resources to support the needs of all students. Limited behavioral health resources prevent students from accessing and securing the support they need. Limited services have led to increased rates of anxiety, depression, and suicide amongst students. There are also gaps in access to health insurance and medical care amongst university students. The ASWWU commits to working to secure increased funding for behavioral health services and medical care. This will help ensure that students are healthier and better equipped to focus on their education and future.

## **THE ASWWU STRONGLY ADVOCATES FOR THE PASSAGE OF A \$300,000 BUDGET PROVISOR THAT WILL ALLOW FOR A STUDENT HEALTH INSURANCE STUDY OF COMMUNITY AND TECHNICAL COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITY STUDENTS.**

- Students need access to preventative healthcare and affordable medical and behavioral health services. This is necessary for students' academic success and well-being; however, gaps in insurance coverage act as a barrier that prevents students from receiving the care they need.
- This study will gather information regarding how many students are uninsured in Washington state, including community and technical college students, undergraduate students, and graduate students. This study will aid in the development of targeted programs to ensure that all students have access to adequate healthcare coverage and services in the future.

## **THE ASWWU STRONGLY ADVOCATES FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF SECONDARY EMERGENCY RESPONSE SERVICES ON UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES, CONSISTENT WITH THE NEW 988 NUMBER.**

- Washington's [HB 1477 \(2021\)](#) takes great measures to ensure that residents in the state are connected to the appropriate resources in the event of an emergency. HB 1477 (2021) established the [Crisis Response Improvement Strategy Committee](#) which will oversee the implementation of the [988 number](#) as a part of the nationwide system. This number is set to launch mid-2022 and will help connect individuals with the appropriate responders, whether police, behavioral health providers, or other services. The strategy committee includes one member representing "a

university-based suicide prevention center of excellence”. Consistent with the goals of this committee, the ASWWU recognizes the need for expanded emergency mental-health support for students on and off university campuses.

- The ASWWU asks that the Legislature support secondary-emergency crisis response programs on university campuses. Currently, campus police are not equipped to address behavioral health crises. In order to ensure that students have access to emergency behavioral health supports, we ask that the legislature support funding for staffed emergency behavioral health responders and increased behavioral health partnerships.

### **THE ASWWU STRONGLY ADVOCATES FOR THE INTEGRATION OF EQUITY AS A FOUNDATIONAL ELEMENT OF THE CURRICULUM IN WASHINGTON STATE’S BEHAVIORAL HEALTH TRAINING PROGRAMS AND CREDENTIALS.**

- Last year, the Legislature passed [SB 5228 \(2021\)](#) which seeks to address disproportionate health outcomes by integrating equity into medical training programs in the state. Similarly, it is important that students pursuing credentials and degrees in behavioral health services are equipped with the knowledge and background necessary to understand issues of equity as it they relate to behavioral health needs. BIPOC individuals have often lacked access to quality behavioral health services and resources. Additionally, LGBTQ+ individuals face disparities in access to behavioral health resources that can be traced to societal stigmas and larger patterns of discrimination.
- The ASWWU supports the establishment of an equity requirement as a part of all curriculum for students pursuing a credential or degree in behavioral health services. This will help to create a workforce that is better equipped to serve individuals who have historically been underserved in this realm.

# Environmental Justice & Campus Sustainability

The ASWWU acknowledges the need to promote and establish sustainable practices and processes on our campus. We recognize that the quality of our built and natural environments impacts student health and long-term well-being. Environmental justice work is directly tied to equity work, the success of students, and the long-term sustainability of our campus. By taking steps to decarbonize Western's built environments and invest in clean energy solutions, the state would be taking steps to meet the goal of carbon neutrality by 2050.

## **THE ASWWU STRONGLY ADVOCATES FOR THE EXPANSION OF HB 1139 (2021) TO EXTEND TO PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS, INCLUDING COMMUNITY COLLEGES, TECHNICAL COLLEGES, AND UNIVERSITIES.**

- There is no federal law requiring public universities to test their drinking water for lead concentration. Recently, Western Washington University has shared plans to test for lead concentration in drinking sources; however, this process has been halted due to the pandemic. According to the university, any water sources equal to or over the action level of 15 parts per billion (ppb) will be put out of service.
- Last year, HB 1139 (2021) was passed that establishes standards for K-12 public schools to take action to assess for and address lead in their drinking water. The Bill gives districts the capacity to act and to apply for grants when the "lead test reveals elevated lead levels, which are lead levels above five parts per billion". This is a more stringent level that Western is currently pursuing. By expanding HB 1139 (2021) to include higher education institutions, the legislature would be taking action to ensure that students at our institutions are not ingesting water with harmful lead toxins.
- This would compel Western, and other public education institutions, to test their water and establish an action plan consistent with the requirements as outlined in the Bill. The ASWWU requests that a reasonable, yet expedient, timeline be established for public higher education institutions to test their water sources, report findings, and develop a plan of action if needed. If these steps are not taken within the timeline, we advocate for a mechanism or consequence that ensures that these tests be administered.



### THE ASWWU STRONGLY ADVOCATES FOR INVESTMENTS IN THE TRANSITION TO A CLEAN ENERGY HEATING SYSTEM ON WESTERN WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY'S CAMPUS.


- Currently, Western Washington University's campus buildings are heated by on-site boilers. Four of the six boilers are set to reach the end of their life by 2030, one as early as 2022. The steam production and burning of natural gas to power the heating system represents just over 33% of Western's annual carbon footprint.
- A study that was funded by the 2021-22 Capital Budget is currently underway to evaluate heating alternatives. This study is working to evaluate ways in which Western could partner with other parts of the community to create a larger sustainable energy system that would serve several parts of the Bellingham area. We ask that the legislature use the results of this study and support a clean energy heating project for Western in 2022-23.
- The ASWWU supports the transition to a clean energy heating system to ensure that our campus is operating in a manner that promotes a healthy environment. We want Western Washington University to serve as a model for clean energy within Bellingham, Whatcom County, and Washington state.

### THE ASWWU STRONGLY ADVOCATES FOR THE PASSAGE OF HB 1631 (2022) TO SUPPORT ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP WITHIN WASHINGTON'S FOOD PRODUCTION SYSTEM.

- Those working in Washington's food production system can play an active role in practicing environmental sustainability and conservation. Generally, farms that use conservation measures are more resilient and, at times, more profitable.
- Additionally, small Washington farmers and agriculturists have been negatively impacted from COVID-related shutdowns and economic shifts.
- This Bill seeks to offer incentives to those in Washington's food production system that voluntarily engage in sustainable practices that meet certain standards.
- This would be a strong step in working to ensure that Washington's food production system is more sustainable and resilient. A stronger food production system would directly benefit students by increasing access to healthy produce and food, thus reducing food insecurity amongst students and other communities.

### THE ASWWU STRONGLY ADVOCATES FOR THE PASSAGE OF HB 1753 (2022) TO STRENGTHEN THE CLIMATE COMMITMENT ACT BY EXPANDING TRIBAL CONSULTATION.

- The passage of the Climate Commitment Act helped establish a strong path to reducing carbon pollution in Washington state. This program will go into effect in 2023 and will center reducing carbon outputs and promoting environmental justice.

- The Climate Commitment Act seeks to promote environmental equity, and the ASWWU recognizes that this cannot be done without input from Washington states tribes who have long championed and promoted issues related to environmental sustainability and stewardship.
  - This Bill would allocate funding to ensure that tribes would be consulted early on funding decisions that would impact their tribal resources, including cultural resources, fisheries, archaeological sites, sacred sites, and other rights and interests in tribal lands. This is necessary to ensure that actions carried out within the Climate Commitment Act are consistent with its goal of achieving environmental equity and justice for all Washington residents.
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# Supporting Survivors of Sexual Assault & Domestic Violence

All students deserve a safe educational experience free of harassment and assault; however, many individuals, including women and LGBTQ+ students, experience disproportionate rates of sexual harassment and violence on college campuses. The ASWWU seeks to increase access to specialists that are well-equipped to handle sexual assault cases in a sensitive and trauma-informed manner. We recognize the need for stronger accountability on our campus against perpetrators of assault and harassment. More broadly, we also seek to increase awareness of Title IX policies and procedures, mandatory reporting, and resources on our campus. Clearer paths to reporting, increased understanding of on-campus resources, and stronger accountability measures is instrumental in working to address the threat of sexual assault at Western and at other campuses in Washington.

## **THE ASWWU STRONGLY ADVOCATES THE WASHINGTON STATE LEGISLATURE TO PASS THE WWU, CWU, EWU, AND EVERGREEN \$5.2 MILLION JOINT OPERATING BUDGET REQUEST.**

- Out of Western Washington University's \$2.1 million portion, the Retention and Academic Success portion includes a request for funding for sexual violence survivor support services.
- Investments in these programs are instrumental in ensuring that students have access to necessary services and resources on campus.

## **THE ASWWU STRONGLY ADVOCATES FOR EXPANDED, TRAUMA-INFORMED SUPPORT SERVICES FOR STUDENTS EXPERIENCING INTERPERSONAL VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT.**

- Students deserve access to trauma-informed handling of sexual assault and IPV cases; however, reporting processes are often difficult and traumatic for students. Currently, resources are often difficult to access, and reporting processes force students to recount traumatic experiences.
- We ask for the establishment of more in-depth, trauma-informed training for all staff working in all offices that handle SA and IPV cases.

- We also ask that all faculty, staff, and student employees undergo yearly trainings to remind and revisit their roles and responsibilities as mandatory reporters. This would help ensure that more groups and individuals on campus are aware of the resources and services the campus has to offer while, also, ensuring that student employees are aware of their responsibility to report if needed.

**THE ASWWU STRONGLY ADVOCATES FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF STRICT ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES FOR ALL HIGHER EDUCATION FACULTY AND STAFF.**

- Colleges and universities throughout Washington state have been under scrutiny for their handling of sexual assault and harassment cases as it relates to faculty and staff. At Western Washington University, “it is the policy of the University to provide an environment in which students, staff, and faculty can work, live and study free from sex discrimination, which includes sexual misconduct”; however staff members who have been found guilty of sexual harassment and misconduct continue to hold positions at the university.
- The ASWWU asks that the legislature establish and mandate stronger disciplinary actions for all college/university faculty and staff that are found guilty of sexual harassment and misconduct. This is necessary to help ensure that students are able to study in an environment that is free from sexual discrimination from faculty and staff.

# Establishing a Statewide Student Association

Student-led representation and advocacy on the campus, community, and state levels is incredibly valuable, and the ASWWU seeks to continually bolster student power. Administrators at Western, and at other institutions, have created complex fee approval systems and processes that stand in the way of student fee autonomy and collective organizing. Therefore, we seek to establish a structure that will ensure student autonomy in fee usage, bolster advocacy efforts, and enable greater political action. This will help secure stronger, more robust, student-led legislative advocacy at Western and our fellow Washington state public higher education institutions.

## THE ASWWU STRONGLY ADVOCATES FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A STATEWIDE STUDENT ASSOCIATION TO STRENGTHEN STUDENT ADVOCACY AND PROMOTE FEE AUTONOMY.

- The Statewide Student Association would grant the Washington Student Achievement Council the authority to levy fees apart from complex university fee structures. WSAC would be empowered to charge membership fees directly to students on an opt-out basis.
- Establishing a Statewide Student Association will:
  - Strengthen university student advocacy, including undergraduate and graduate students, as well as community and technical college students. Currently, community and technical college students have no direct route to engage in student-led advocacy.
  - Ensure that fees levied to students are transparent. Many students at Western don't know where their Legislative Action Fee is spent and the role it plays in student advocacy efforts. This model would create a funding mechanism where the fee is levied directly to students on an opt-out basis. By avoiding complex Services and Activities Fees, students would have a stronger understanding of where their money is spent.
  - Boost individual student involvement. Funding constraints, institutional administration, and a lack of organization have made it difficult for certain colleges to pay membership dues to organizing bodies, like the Washington Student Association. This structure would allow students to individually organize and pay into the Association regardless of campus constraints.
  - The ASWWU anticipates that this will bolster student engagement and awareness of WSAC, the Washington Student Association, and other routes to student advocacy. Student fee autonomy and stronger student advocacy is of high importance to the ASWWU.



# Civic Engagement & Voting Rights

The ASWWU recognizes the value of student engagement in the civic and political processes in our communities, state, and beyond. Providing and maintaining clear paths to engagement with local and state officials have never been more important for students. Therefore, we seek to establish and expand paths to civic engagement, while also expanding voting rights and processes. Accessibility to our leaders helps ensure that students' voices are heard, and this is instrumental when discussing student-centered policy issues. The ASWWU also acknowledges that expanding voting rights and improving electoral processes will help ensure that student voices, and other historically marginalized groups, are well represented in our communities and state.

## **THE ASWWU STRONGLY ADVOCATES FOR THE PASSAGE OF [SB 5584 \(2022\)](#) TO INCREASE OPPORTUNITY FOR COUNTIES, CITIES, TOWNS, SCHOOL DISTRICTS, FIRE DISTRICTS, OR PORT DISTRICTS TO ESTABLISH RANKED-CHOICE VOTING SYSTEMS.**

- Ranked-choice voting is a model of voting that allows individuals to select and rank candidates that align with their values and preferences. Ranked-choice voting is associated with increased voter turnout, as each individual is able to make more informed, thoughtful choices when they vote.
- Ranked-choice voting is associated with decreased campaign costs. From an equity perspective, this will allow a more wide array of individuals to run for elected office regardless of socioeconomic status or other potential barriers. This makes running a campaign more financially feasible and accessible for a broader range of individuals.
- Additionally, ranked-choice voting promotes issue-centered campaigns and incentivizes candidates to discuss key topics and policies. This civility leads to more productive campaigns. This also provides voters with a stronger understanding of each candidates' positions and priorities. This Bill would grant local jurisdictions to adopt ranked-choice voting; it would not mandate them to do so. The ASWWU believes this is a strong first step in improving voting systems to ensure more equitable and fair elections.

### **THE ASWWU STRONGLY ADVOCATES FOR THE PASSAGE OF SB 5597 (2022) TO STRENGTHEN THE WASHINGTON VOTING RIGHTS ACT.**

- The Washington Voting Rights Act sought to "ensure that every voter has an equal opportunity to elect the candidate of their choice" through their vote. The WVRA helps empower local governments to improve their electoral systems to promote voter inclusion.
- Nationwide, barriers to voting and voting suppression disenfranchise many people of color, low-income communities, and individuals with a felony in their past. The ASWWU supports measures to expand voting rights and access to the vote.
- HB 5597 seeks to improve the WVRA by expanding protections by preventing race, ethnicity, or language-minority status from being used to determine access to vote. The Bill seeks to strengthen language to protect those of historically and commonly disenfranchised identities.

### **THE ASWWU STRONGLY ADVOCATES FOR THE PASSAGE OF SB 5583 (2022) TO REQUIRE THE CENSUS DATA FOR LOCAL REDISTRICTING PURPOSES TO REFLECT THE LAST KNOWN PLACE OF RESIDENCE FOR INCARCERATED PERSONS.**

- Washington state has taken strong steps to ensure that formerly incarcerated individuals are granted the right to vote, such as the passage of HB 1078 (2021); however, the ASWWU believes that there are still measures the state must take to support the voting rights of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals.
- SB 5583 (2022) would ensure that census data that is used for local redistricting purposes reflects the last known place of residence for incarcerated persons. This information is key to helping strengthen representation for many communities and neighborhoods across Washington state.

### **THE ASWWU STRONGLY ADVOCATES FOR THE PASSAGE OF SB 5497 (2022) TO GRANT VOTING AUTHORITY TO STUDENTS ON THE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION.**


- The State Board of Education exists to advocate for the improvement of Washington's education system. The Board seeks to develop policies and implement programs that strengthen education in the state.
- In the Board's equity statement it explains that the body seeks to "actively engage with Washington's underserved communities" and "use equity as a lens to continuously assess and improve" education.
- Currently, there are two students that sit on the Board, one from eastern Washington and one from western Washington.
  - While these positions are held by high school students, the ASWWU aims to promote civic engagement and involvement beyond college students.
  - Granting students voting power on the Board would help ensure that student voices are valued in decisions regarding education policies and procedures in Washington state.



**THE ASWWU STRONGLY ADVOCATES FOR THE PASSAGE OF SB 5636 (2022) TO EXPAND OPPORTUNITIES FOR VOTER REGISTRATION.**

- This Bill seeks to expand opportunities for Washington residents to register to vote. This would allow those applying, replacing, or renewing a permit, driver's license, qualifying identification card, or updating their address, be given the opportunity to automatically register to vote. The Bill would also increase opportunities for 16 and 17-year-olds to pre-register to vote.
- These actions would help to ensure that more residents in Washington state are registered to vote. This helps remove a barrier to voting, and the ASWWU believes this is a strong measure to increase voter turnout and promote civic engagement.

**THE ASWWU STRONGLY ADVOCATES FOR THE PASSAGE OF HB 1802 (2022) TO SUPPORT AND PROMOTE THE REPRESENTATION OF DISABLED INDIVIDUALS IN THE LEGISLATURE.**

- The ASWWU recognizes the importance and value of centering and elevating input from Disabled students, peers, and Washington residents. There are numerous barriers that prevent individuals from participating in the state's legislative process, and even more so that exist for folks with disabilities.
  - Disabled individuals have unique, valuable lived experiences that should be centered in many policy areas. Oftentimes, people with disabilities are excluded from legislative decisions that affect them most. This Bill seeks to remove barriers to legislative advocacy and increase access to legislative spaces and policy conversations for those with disabilities.
  - The ASWWU believes this is a key step to ensuring that legislation centers and reflects the various needs and interests of many Disabled individuals in Washington state.
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# Divesting from Prison Labor

Many students at Western Washington University have been advocating for the end of our university's contract with Aramark Dining. Additionally, students have expressed interest in divesting our university from prison labor; however, administrative objectives and other restrictions have prevented this from happening. Students across the state have engaged in similar advocacy efforts directed toward their campus administration. University of Washington's 2019 Student Senate introduced a referendum calling on the university to fully divest from prison labor, and other student bodies across the state have taken similar actions.

## **THE ASWWU STRONGLY ADVOCATES THAT RCW 39.26.250 BE REPEALED.**

- Currently, RCW 39.26.250 requires public institutions to give preference to goods and services associated with a prison labor work program. This law currently forces universities to consider, and incentivizes them to choose, goods and services that are affiliated with a prison labor program. To many students, this is an ethical dilemma, as workers in these prison labor programs are paid a minimum of \$0.65 per hour and a maximum of \$1.70 per hour.
- Repealing RCW 39.26.250 will allow Western Washington University, and other public higher education institutions to freely consider goods and services produced elsewhere.
- The ASWWU believes this is the first step in working to ensure that Western Washington University divests from prison labor and turns toward more ethical options.



# Dedicated Revenue & Budgeting

The ASWWU recommends implementing progressive, reasonable sources of revenue and improve funding mechanisms to promote equity within Washington state. Decreasing tuition and funding financial aid and student support services are necessary to assist college and university students in Washington State. Increased investments in higher education will help assist historically marginalized communities, including Black and Indigenous people of color, first-generation students, and nontraditional students. The ASWWU supports measures that will propel Washington State towards equity in both tax policy and higher education.

## THE ASWWU STRONGLY ADVOCATES THAT THE LEGISLATURE:

- Pass [HB 1406 \(2022\)](#) to create a Washington state wealth tax and tax extraordinary financial intangible assets
- Amending phase-out rates in [ESHB 1297 \(2021\)](#) of the Working Families Tax Credit
- Pass \$7.3 million budget proviso for Community Services Block Grant Matching which would support the needs of BIPOC and rural communities
- Prioritize disaster preparedness and community development and resilience into budgets and funding mechanisms
- Remove exemptions from the Real Estate Excise Tax, including untaxed, multi-million dollar inheritances
- Tax Washington State Lottery Winnings





Contributions from:  
ASWWU Executive Board  
ASWWU Student Senate  
ASWWU Legislative Affairs Council  
ASWWU Office of Civic Engagement  
Western Washington University Students