

Quaker Voice on Washington Public Policy

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Legislative Report 2017

by Noah Martin, Legislative Advocate

A Quick Summary of Action on our Focus Bills

See www.quakervoicewa.org for more details

Working Group	Issue	House Bill #	Senate Bill #	Status
Environmental Stewardship & Peace	Price on Carbon	HB 1646	N/a	Died in committee
	Solar Tax Credits	N/a	SB 5939	Signed by the governor.
	Close the Big Oil Sales Tax Loophole	Budget	Budget	Signed by the governor
	Oil Transit Safety	HB 1611	SB 5462	Died in committee.
Criminal Justice	LFO Reform	HB 1783	N/a	Died in committee.
	Corrections Ombuds	N/a	SB 5952	Died in committee.
	Post-Secondary Prison Education	HB 1129	SB 5069	Signed by the governor.
	Restore Parole	HB 1789	SB 5600	Died in committee.
	Abolition of the death penalty	HB 1935	SB 5354	Died in committee.
Economic Justice	Restore TANF	Budget	Budget	\$4M (2.5%) increase in funding, but lowered accessibility.
	Increase HEN/ABD	Budget	Budget	No increase or decrease in funding.
	Workfirst Education extended to two years	HB 1566	N/a	Signed by the governor.
	State Bank	HB 2059	SB 5464	Died in committee.
	Capital Gains Tax	HB 1730	SB 5111	Died during budget negotiations.

Successes for Environmental Stewardship & Peace

Community Solar Tax Credits/Reform — Legislation enacted

The clock was ticking on solar tax credits legislation, with the last round of credits set to expire in 2019. As of June, this looked like it had been stalled in the legislature. But last-minute maneuvers around the budget and efforts to reach across the aisle led to a significantly moderated law signed by the governor. Under the new law, SB 5939, residential and community base rate production incentives start at 16¢/kWh for systems installed in 2018 and decline 2¢/kWh each year to 10¢/kWh in 2021.

The bill also provides new incentives for small businesses to share in a commercial solar utility while eliminating the House bill's provisions for solar cooperatives. It requires manufacturers of panels sold "in and into the state" to develop a plan for recycling panels by 2021 while reducing solar incentives in terms of funding and duration, to reflect market cost reductions in solar. Overall, the bill does put up some additional barriers to entry and lowers the incentives offered, but managed to establish stability for the industry until 2021. The issue will likely be revisited next year if control of the Senate changes.

Close the Oil Sales Tax Loophole — Legislation enacted

Washington's tax system received a much-needed reform in the 2017 budget. Oil refining companies had been exploiting a long-standing tax credit designed for Washington's timber industry (worded in the legislation as "extracted fuel") to earn \$52 million/year from the state. A deal was reached during negotiations to close this loophole to the oil industry, freeing up funds for the rest of the budget.

Success in Criminal Justice

Post-Secondary Prison Education — Legislation enacted

Allowing public institutions to offer associate's degree programs in prisons, with priority and placement being determined by the Dept. of Corrections is an important achievement in the effort to reconstruct people's lives by rehabilitating them back into their communities, and in the values it represents – equal opportunity, building community, and embracing the journey of education for all people – are unequivocal Quaker values.

Successes (some partial) in Economic Justice

Workfirst Education — Legislation enacted

Legislation on educational opportunities for TANF recipients represents another success for Quaker Voice this year. Extending the period recipients of TANF can enroll in the Workfirst aid program to take classes at a community college or vocational school from one to two years allows students to actually acquire a degree and make full use of the program. Funding was also increased in the budget by 2.5%. Having a degree or vocational credentials, rather than half finishing a program, should produce far better outcomes and help lift up lower income families.

Restore TANF level — Increased, but only a tiny portion of our goal

Quaker Voice's stated goal at the beginning of the session was to restore TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) to its pre-1996 levels, representing a 30% increase in funding (roughly \$75M). The 2017 operating budget contains a \$4M (2.5%) increase to TANF. The Senate has not explicitly cut funding to the program, but has introduced legislation (SB 5898) to further restrict recipients of TANF to people who can provide proof of having performed a job search. This will likely result in an effective cut in services, but estimates of just how much it will amount to vary dramatically. Overall, given where the federal budget is going to go, such a small increase in funding is nowhere close to adequate and TANF recipients are going to suffer from even more cuts.

HEN/ABD — Only prevented cuts

The original Senate budget eliminated HEN (Housing and Essential Needs) and ABD (Aged, Blind, and Disabled) entirely, which sparked intense criticism from Democrats and humanitarian organizations in the state, as well as some criticism from centrist Republicans. Because of the efforts of Quaker Voice and its coalition partners working with legislators like Sens. Miloscia, Darnielle, and Zeiger, the Senate quickly produced a new version of the budget that left HEN and ABD untouched. The 2017 operating budget did not encompass any of the hoped-for increases in the governor's or the House's budget, but we did manage to prevent more cuts to these programs in the face of an overall 5% decrease in human services.