

The 2021 Legislative Session: Weeks Four-Five (January 31 – February 13)

The end of week five has us now a third of the way through the 105-day regular session and past the first major cut-off. After Feb. 15, any bill which is to continue in the legislative process must have received a favorable vote out of the policy committee to which it was referred for public hearing. While there are exceptions, bills which fail to get the needed hearing and committee vote will generally be considered “dead” for the session.

Bills reported out of a policy committee with potential to impact the state budget are subsequently referred to a fiscal committee: Ways & Means in the Senate, or Finance or Appropriations in the House. Those committees have an additional week, until Feb. 22, before their deadline.

It’s critical that legislators hear directly from WAFP members on bills of importance to family medicine. It’s never a bad time to register your opinion, and there are a number of ways of doing so, each of them outlined [here](#). Among the easiest is the Legislative Hotline (1-800-562-6000). Meriting your support at this point is [HB 1196](#), requiring insurance reimbursement for audio-only telemedicine. It would be particularly helpful to let your legislators know how essential and effective this has been during the pandemic in caring for patients with a variety of conditions.

Some bills on which WAFP has been engaged will no longer require as much attention. [SB 5222](#), which would have required insurance companies to reimburse ARNPs at the same rate as physicians, was not reported out of the Senate Health & Long Term Care Committee. [SB 5155](#), which will add to the cost of tort claims, was amended to explicitly exempt medical malpractice cases. [HB 1368](#) distributes federal COVID-19 relief funds, including to public health agencies, community health centers, and rural clinics. It has passed the legislature and is on its way to Gov. Jay Inslee for his signature. [HB 1095](#), which exempts COVID-19 relief funds from state taxes, is also headed to the governor’s desk.

WAFP’s annual Family Medicine Advocacy Day (FMAD) took place in a virtual format on Feb. 1. Academy members situated around the state were able to meet legislators and other policymakers and discuss with them, and among themselves, WAFP’s legislative agenda and other matters of interest to family medicine.

Joining us over the course of the morning were Sen. Annette Cleveland (D-Vancouver), chair of the Senate Health & Long Term Care Committee and a member of the Senate Housing & Local Government Committee; Sen. Ron Muzzall (R-Oak Harbor), ranking member of the Senate Health & Long Term Care Committee and a member of the Senate Ways & Means Committee; Kelly Cooper, policy and legislative relations director for the Washington State Department of Health; MaryAnne Lindeblad, Medicaid director for the Washington State Health Care Authority; and Elizabeth Mitchell, president and CEO of the Purchaser’s Business Group on Health.

FMAD attendees then had appointments in the afternoon – or in some cases on subsequent days – to meet in small groups with the legislators representing where they practice and/or live, talking with them about family medicine and encouraging them to support WAFP’s agenda. In all, more than 70 appointments were made.