

The 2021 Legislative Session: Weeks Twelve-Thirteen (March 28 – April 11)

Sunday, April 11, was the deadline for any non-budget bill still under consideration to be voted out of the chamber opposite that in which it was introduced. Senate bills not acted upon by the House, and House bills not acted upon by the Senate, are generally done for the year. With less than two weeks to go until the end of the 105-day regular session on April 25, much has been settled, with a few remaining items about which WAFP members should be attentive.

The House and Senate have each passed their own version of [SB 5092](#), the state's [2021-2023 operating budget](#), and began negotiating a final agreement late last week. The Academy sent a letter to the legislators leading these negotiations requesting the following be carried over to the final budget:

- Items common to both the House and Senate proposals that are important to family medicine. These include Medicaid rate increases for behavioral health, primary care, and family planning services; funding to maintain the Family Medicine Residency Network; and substantial new funding for foundational public health.
- The Senate's \$150,000 appropriation to the Health Care Authority, explicitly requested by WAFP, for the continued implementation of the Authority's Primary Care Transformation Initiative. With the initiative aimed at prioritizing primary care in the state, the appropriation and accompanying language would allow for some needed consultant work and help keep HCA accountable for moving the work forward.
- The House's \$35 million appropriation to the Health Care Authority to distribute as grants to community health centers, public hospitals, and others for primary care and other services to low-income individuals regardless of immigration status — helping them meet the needs of a too-often overlooked segment of Washingtonians.

WAFP members are encouraged to contact your own legislators this week to reinforce these budget requests, emphasizing to them why they are important to your practice and your patients. There are [a number of ways of doing so](#), with the legislative hotline perhaps the easiest (800-562-6000).

Other legislation of interest to WAFP around which there has been activity over the past two weeks include:

- **Audio-only telemedicine.** [HB 1196](#) requires audio-only telemedicine visits be reimbursed at the same rate as in-person visits. It was amended slightly by the Ways & Means Committee before passing the Senate by a large majority. The bill now goes back to the House, which is expected to concur with the amendments made by the Senate and send the bill to the Gov. Jay Inslee's desk.
- **Pregnancy and miscarriage-related patient care.** [SB 5140](#) prohibits health care entities from restricting health care providers from providing services related to pregnancy complications. The bill is now before the Senate, which is expected to concur with the

amendment made by the House regarding attorney's fees in the case of an enforcement action and send the bill to the governor's desk.

- **Postpartum Medicaid coverage.** [SB 5068](#) extends postpartum Medicaid coverage from its current 60 days to one year following the end of a pregnancy. The bill passed the House overwhelmingly. Since it was not amended there, it need not go back to the Senate but is instead headed to the governor's desk, where he is expected to sign it.
- **Public health system restructuring.** [HB 1152](#) as introduced made substantial changes to the structure of the state's public health system. It was narrowed significantly in scope and effect as it moved through the legislative process, with the Senate recently eliminating most of its provisions before passing it by a bare majority. It's now up to the House to decide whether to agree with the amended bill, seek additional changes, or let it die for the session.
- **Low carbon fuel standards.** [HB 1091](#) directs the Department of Ecology to establish a Clean Fuels Program to limit aggregate, overall greenhouse gas emissions. The Senate amended the bill before narrowly passing it. It's now up to the House to decide whether to agree with the amended bill or seek additional changes.