

## ABOUT WA SAFE + HEALTHY

WA Safe + Healthy is a coalition of healthcare workers, their unions, and community organizations working to address safe staffing and ensure the safety of both workers and patients. Collectively, the Washington State Nurses Association, UFCW 3000 and SEIU Healthcare 1199NW represent more than 75,000 healthcare workers in Washington.

In 2023 the Legislature passed SB 5236 on hospital staffing standards, an important step towards safer staffing. It's a long way off until full implementation, and in the meantime Washington healthcare workers are still struggling to course correct from challenges that arose from COVID-19 as well as those predating the pandemic. WA Safe + Healthy is committed to pursuing additional policies to improve safety for workers and patients.

### HB 2061 - Ensuring overtime protections

Washington's strong overtime standards have applied to some healthcare workers for years, but other healthcare workers in hospitals are excluded and have no protections at all. That doesn't reflect how care is delivered in our hospitals. Healthcare workers are essential for the wellbeing of patients, and it is critical that they have the rest and job protections they need – both for their own wellbeing and for the safety of the patients in their care. This bill would expand overtime protections to all frontline hospital workers.

### HB 1263/SB 5241 - Preventing anticompetitive mergers and protecting access

This bill, known as the Keep Our Care Act, would improve the state's advanced review of proposed health system mergers and consolidations to ensure that affordable care continues and the needs of marginalized communities are considered.

### HB 1508/SB 5519 - Strengthening the Health Care Cost Transparency Board

This year's bill would provide some transparency improvements for the state's Health Care Cost Transparency Board (HCCTB). Main components of the bill include adding consumers, labor, purchasers, and employers to HCCTB advisory committee; establishing an underinsurance survey be conducted regularly; facilitating data-sharing between agencies to improve efficiency; allowing consideration of additional cost drivers; and requiring annual public hearing with entities that have exceeded the benchmark.

## **HB 2066/SB 5948 - Improving accountability through fair contract negotiations**

This bill would restrict big, consolidated health systems from anti-competitive bargaining when they negotiate pay rates, to make sure there's a level playing field that rewards higher-quality, lower-priced providers.

## **HB 2119 - Prohibiting wage garnishment for medical debt**

Patients often incur medical debt from the costs associated with diagnosing, treating, and managing an injury or illness. Medical debt can cause extraordinary financial hardship, stress, and strain for patients and their families. Patients are also much more likely to delay or avoid medical care when facing debt. This legislation would prohibit earnings from being garnished by debt collectors if the debt is from medical care.

## **HB 2285/SB 5986 - Ground ambulance balance billing**

Balance billing is when an insured patient receives an extra bill for charges on covered services from an out-of-network provider. While Washington already prohibits balance billing broadly, ground ambulance services are not covered by the state or federal balance billing law, nor are there any limits on what can be charged. This bill prohibits ground ambulance balance billing and restricts charges for ambulance service to a default rate, either the local municipal rate or a percentage of Medicare reimbursement.

## **HB 1495/SB 5373 - Equal reimbursement for ARNPs**

In recent years, private health plans lowered payments to Washington practices when services are provided by an advanced registered nurse practitioner (ARNP) and not a physician. Reduced ARNP reimbursement saves the insurers money, but it costs clinics and the patients they serve by making it harder to keep practices open. And studies comparing patient safety, patient satisfaction, and care quality consistently find similar results between ARNP and physician care. Washington's Medicaid and L&I reimburse 100% for ARNP services. Private health plans should follow the lead of state payers and reimburse ARNPs the same amount as physicians for the same service.