

## 2023 Legislative Session

In its first face-to-face session since the pandemic, the state legislature faced a tight budget in the wake of the end of federal relief funds. The Washington State Legislature nonetheless made major strides forward in several areas of long-term Quaker Voice advocacy, even outside of this year's priority bills.

- The **death penalty was repealed** in state legislation, as part of a bill to repeal all laws that the state Supreme Court had ruled unconstitutional.
- The manufacture, sale, and distribution of **assault weapons** was banned, a step towards removing the horrors that weapons of war can unleash in our communities.
- **The crime victim penalty** was eliminated for indigent adults, allowing low-income formerly incarcerated people a chance to move on with their lives instead of trapping them in a cycle of debt.

**Investment in the \$400 million allocated for the state's Housing Trust Fund** expands the state's commitment to an affordable housing supply. Hybrid committee hearings continued to allow the public to register their views on bills and testify remotely. Quaker Voice took advantage of the hybrid environment to issue over 20 Action Alerts, mobilizing our voices from around the state throughout the session. Quaker Lobby Day went spontaneously hybrid as district delegations found creative ways with laptops and cell phones to include distance participants within in-person meetings. The Board also stepped forward on the Equality Testimony section of the new [Testimonies and Issue Areas statement](#), writing to legislators opposing a bill that would have made gender affirming health care illegal.

Five Quaker Voice priority bills are now session law.

- [1085 Reducing Plastic Pollution](#). This bill reduces Styrofoam use in docks, forbids small plastic containers for amenities in hotels, and requires water bottle refilling stations in some buildings.
- [1110 Middle Housing](#) mandates cities to allow higher-density housing in areas traditionally dedicated to single-family detached units.
- [1474 Covenant home ownership fund](#) provides down payment and closing costs to families excluded in the past from home ownership on racial grounds.
- [5120 Crisis Relief Centers](#) requires the Department of Health to license facilities to offer access to behavioral health to adults, reducing police intervention, open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
- [5189 Behavioral Health Support Specialists](#) requires the Department of Health to develop rules for certifying specialists to provide brief, evidence-based behavioral health interventions under supervision.

The table below summarizes action on all of the priority bills. The rest of the report summarizes the priorities and watch-lists of each working group, along with the action taken on those bills (successful bills are shaded in green).

### 2023 Priority Bills

Bill Number	Working Group	Sponsor	Bill Descriptor	Senate Action	House Action	Governor Action	Final Status
1045	Economic Justice	Berry (36th)	Basic Income Pilot	Did not cross over	Stopped at Appropriations		Did not pass
1085	Environmental Stewardship	Mena (29th)	Reducing Plastic Pollution	Passed 37 to 11	Passed 97 to 0	Signed	Effective 7/23/23
1087	Criminal Justice	Peterson (21 <sup>st</sup> )	Limiting Solitary Confinement	Did not cross over	Stopped at Appropriations		Did not pass
1110	Economic Justice	Bateman (22 <sup>nd</sup> )	Middle Housing	Passed 35 to 14	Passed 75 to 21	Signed	Effective 7/23/23
1268	Criminal Justice	Goodman (45 <sup>th</sup> )	Unstacking Sentencing Enhancements	Passed out of Rules committee	Passed 53 to 42		Did not pass
1392	Environmental Stewardship	Gregerson (33 <sup>rd</sup> )	Right to Repair	No action taken in policy committee	Passed 58 to 38		Did not pass
1474	Economic Justice	Taylor (30 <sup>th</sup> )	Covenant home ownership fund	Passed 30 to 19	Passed 53 to 43	Signed	Effective 7/23/23
5120	Criminal Justice	Dhingra (45 <sup>th</sup> )	Crisis Relief Centers	Passed 47 to 0	Passed 97 to 0	Signed	Effective 7/23/23
5189	Economic Justice	Trudeau (27 <sup>th</sup> )	Behavioral Health Support Specialists	Passed 46 to 0	Passed 98 to 0	Signed	Effective 7/23/23

## Criminal Justice Working Group

One Criminal Justice priority bill passed this session, along with six bills that received secondary support.

**SB 5120 on Crisis Relief Centers** sets the authority for establishing a new short-term treatment setting for people in mental health crisis. When friends and family call for help, police often handle these crisis calls rather than behavioral health specialists. Too often, the only options for further support are emergency rooms or jail. These centers will provide an alternative that is less expensive and more effective. Open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, staffed with behavioral health specialists, the Crisis Relief Centers provide a calm space where needs can be assessed and a next step planned, during the first 24 hours after arrival.

**HB 1268 would have offered judicial discretion for sentencing enhancements.** Judges are now required to add minimum numbers of years to prison sentences for certain offenses (these are called “sentencing enhancements”). For example, if one person in a robbery has a gun, everyone convicted in that robbery gets extra years in prison. This can apply to each of several counts, so the extensions can stack up to be very substantial. This bill would give judges discretion in making those extensions based on the circumstances of individual cases. The bill passed the House this year but did not have the votes in the Senate. The working group will be continuing to seek support for the bill in 2024.

**HB 1087, limiting solitary confinement,** will also stay on the group’s agenda in 2024. Several years ago, the Department of Corrections eliminated solitary confinement for disciplinary purposes. This bill would put that limitation into law, allowing the practice only for medical reasons or if harm is expected to the prisoner or others. The Department of Corrections projected a very large cost for implementing it by including in-depth attention to individual detainees, like the humane system used in Norway. Because of the price tag, the bill did not pass the House Appropriations Committee this year.

The Criminal Justice Working Group provided secondary support to several bills in areas that Washington Quakers have identified as important. Those that passed are:

- *SB 5046, Counsel for Resentencing.* The bill will pay for counsel for low-income incarcerated people who are eligible for resentencing, for example because what they were charged with is no longer a crime, but who could not afford legal help otherwise.
- *SB 5078, Industry Liability for Firearms,* allows individuals who are injured by firearms to sue manufacturers for damages.
- *SB 5131, No Deductions for Family Support Funds,* allows incarcerated individuals to receive the full amount of family support funds they receive, rather than having fees taken out by the prison.
- *SB 5134, Re-entry Services and Gate Money,* requires the Department of Corrections to develop an individual discharge plan and provide reentry services prior to an incarcerated individual's release and it increases the number of days of medications provided on release. Unfortunately, an increase in cash provided (“gate money”) was dropped and the amount remains capped at \$40, as originally established in 1971 and never altered. Also, the Governor vetoed a provision to evaluate the health needs of

returning citizens and make connections for them with health providers, on the grounds that the funding allocated was not sufficient.

- *HB 1240, Banning Assault Weapons*, made Washington the tenth state to enact such restrictions. The ban is prospective, that is, it bans sale, manufacturing, and distribution from the time the law is effective but leaves current weapons in the hands of their owners.
- *SB 5087*, an omnibus repeal of laws the State Supreme Court had ruled as unconstitutional, including the death penalty.

The working group followed other bills that could become priorities for next year, including HB 1513 (Traffic Safety for All), HB 1174 (removing barriers to voting in jail), and HB 1024 (minimum wage for prison labor).

## **Economic Justice Working Group**

The Economic Justice Working Group continued to focus on housing, mental health, and income support legislation. An exciting development in its long-standing work on tax reform was the State Supreme Court's decision upholding the capital gains tax passed last year.

A historic step in housing justice was the passage of **HB 1474, establishing the Covenant Home Ownership Account**. The Account is a special purpose credit program to reduce racial disparities in homeownership in the state by providing down payment and closing cost assistance to qualified applicants. Homeownership has long been a leading driver for the creation of household wealth. Redlining, broad discrimination in financial institutions, racially restrictive covenants, and limited access to guaranteed home mortgages have for many decades impaired the ability of African Americans to purchase homes, resulting in a massive racial household wealth disparity of 8:1 (white to Black). Racial disparity in homeownership is significantly greater now than it was before fair housing legislation in the 1960s. The implications of this disparity are grave in that home equity and household wealth greatly affect where families are able to live, attend schools, work, shop, and worship as well as their ability to invest, finance educations, and create small businesses. This bill takes a first step to redress systemic racism in the real estate, banking, and credit industries in Washington state.

Quaker Voice also lobbied for the successful passage of **HB 1110, the "Middle Housing" bill**, that reduces zoning obstacles to the kinds of communities Quaker Voice supports – where all people can afford to purchase or rent, where easy transportation between work and home is more readily available, and where our neighborhoods are more economically and racially diverse. In too many cities across the state, Washingtonians cannot find such housing in their communities. The cost of housing nearly everywhere is skyrocketing, so-called "middle housing" that is affordable has been disappearing, and gentrification of lower income neighborhoods is contributing to homelessness and increased racial disparities in household wealth and home ownership. Creation of affordable housing for all thus becomes a moral issue as well. HB 1110 takes steps in addressing it.

Addressing the crisis in mental health was a priority for the Governor this year, and the Quaker Voice lobbied for two of the bills in the suite of those introduced, one in Criminal Justice (SB 5120, described above) and in Economic Justice, a bill **expanding the mental health workforce, SB 5189**. Passage of this bill establishes a new level of mental health

professional, a Behavioral Health Support Specialist. Jobs at this level will be more accessible to college graduates than mental health professional jobs and encourage enough people in the workforce to meet the growing demand in mental health response and treatment centers around the state.

The other priority bill in the Economic Justice area, **HB 1045, the Guaranteed Basic Income Pilot**, did not move beyond the House Appropriations Committee. The budget was too tight this year to support new programs. This one would have distributed modest levels of flexible funds to low-income families. Such flexible support has been found to be one of the most effective ways to get families back on their feet, because they can use the money where their family circumstances need them most. Smaller pilot programs in Washington have shown its success. Quaker Voice will still be there, supporting this concept, when the opportunity opens up to begin funding it at the necessary levels.

The Economic Justice working group supported one additional bill, **HB 1094, the Washington Future Fund Program**. Nicknamed “Baby Bonds,” this program would have put money into an account for every child born in poverty in the state of Washington each year. When those children reached ages 18 to 35, they could claim the money for education, purchasing a home, or starting a business in Washington. This creative redistributive financing mechanism is gaining in popularity across the country and could be on a future priority list for Quaker Voice, even though it did not pass through the tight fiscal filters this year.

## **Environmental Stewardship Working Group**

One priority bill from the Environmental Stewardship Working Group passed easily this year, with broad bipartisan support, **HB 1085, Reducing Plastic Pollution**. This bill will reduce plastic waste and pollution, which endanger human’s and other animals’ health. It will remove some single-use plastic water bottles by requiring water-bottle filling stations in new commercial buildings where drinking fountains are required, phase out some small plastic containers for personal health and beauty products in lodging establishments, and disallows thin-walled or soft-shell floating plastic foam structures which contribute to small and microplastic pollution of marine and shoreline environments.

A second priority bill broke our hearts again, the **Right to Repair bill, HB 1392**. Negotiations over the summer had looked promising and the bill moved further than it did last year, passing out of the House but not the Senate. The bill’s sponsor, Representative Mia Gregerson, thanked Quaker Voice directly for our testimony and support. The Right to Repair addresses issues of both economic inequality and environmental stewardship. Manufacturers currently place restrictions on who can repair their products so that they can monopolize the repair market. In addition to reducing unnecessary waste, promoting the fair servicing and repair of digital electronic products in a safe, secure, reliable, and sustainable manner will increase access to appropriate and affordable digital products, support small businesses and jobs, and enhance digital connectivity in Washington state.

Two bills on the working group’s support list also became law this year:

- *HB 1170, Improving Climate Resilience*, which calls for an update to the state’s integrated climate response strategy, first published in 2012. The 2021 Climate

Commitment Act requires the Governor to take a strategic approach to addressing climate risks.

- *HB 1176, the Climate Workforce Act*, establishes the Washington Climate Corps, with opportunities for young adults in clean energy careers, with an emphasis on overburdened communities.

The working group identified several other promising bills that are likely to be worthy of our support next year.

- *HB 1131/ SB 5154, Solid Waste Management*, tackles issues in packaging and paper products and recycled plastic items and sets up a deposit return system for drink containers.
- *HB 1381, Salmon Safe Communities*, takes on urban heat island effects on water temperatures where salmon need cold water to survive.
- *HB 1433, Housing Energy Labeling*, moves towards use of home energy performance scoring systems
- *HB 1554, Reducing Lead Impacts*, addresses exposures from leaded aviation gasoline.
- *HB 1589, Clean Energy Transformations in Gas*, phases out new gas installations by Puget Sound Energy
- *HB 1368/ SB 5431, Zero Emission School Buses*, requires and funds them, with a goal of 70% of purchases being zero-emission by 2030.