Washington State Library Association had a very active 2024 session. From January 8th until Sine Die on March 7th we navigated through hundreds of bills, testimonies, and Capitol Day to end up on the other side with some pretty major victories.

The session itself featured major public policy debates and long floor sessions on the topics of energy, housing/rent control and public safety, where majority Democrats achieved some, but not all, of their top priorities for the year. Supplemental budgets were also negotiated and adopted.

One big story of the session was the introduction of six Republican-backed citizen initiatives that were certified to the Legislature: [I-2081](https://app.leg.wa.gov/billsummary?BillNumber=2081&year=2023&initiative=True), a parental rights in public education proposal; [I-2109](https://app.leg.wa.gov/billsummary?BillNumber=2109&year=2023&initiative=True), repealing the state's tax on capital gains; [I-2111](https://app.leg.wa.gov/billsummary?BillNumber=2111&year=2023&initiative=True), prohibiting the state and local governments from adopting an income tax; [I-2113](https://app.leg.wa.gov/billsummary?BillNumber=2113&year=2023&initiative=True), regarding standards for police pursuit of suspects; [I-2117](https://app.leg.wa.gov/billsummary?BillNumber=2117&year=2023&initiative=True), repealing the state's Climate Commitment Act (CCA); and [I-2124](https://app.leg.wa.gov/billsummary?BillNumber=2124&year=2023&initiative=True), allowing opt-out of the state's long term care insurance program. Democratic leaders decided not to hear I-2109, I-2117, and I-2124, citing their fiscal impact on existing programs, and sent them directly to the voters this fall. Lawmakers ultimately passed the remaining three initiatives on police pursuits, income taxes, and parental rights by relatively large margins. As approved initiatives, they become law without action from the Governor.

All of the three initiatives that passed were reviewed for their impact on laws and priorities. I-2081, the parental rights initiative, has the closest impact for WLA because it does allow parents the ability to review instructional materials being used their child’s classroom and to review records related to their child. However, after significant review by legislators and legislative staff, it was determined that most of the “rights” in the initiative already existed in current state or federal law and that the initiative mostly put these rights into one place. In addition, by passing this and the other two initiatives, legislators have the ability to amend them more quickly if problems arise. If they are passed at the ballot, the Legislature cannot do any amendments for 2 years after passage.

**Making It Harder to Dissolve Public Libraries**

WLA had a few key victories this year. First, in response to the Dayton Library crisis, Secretary of State Steve Hobbs stepped in to introduce a bill [(SB 5824](https://app.leg.wa.gov/billsummary?BillNumber=5824&Year=2023&Initiative=false)) – sponsored by Senator Sam Hunt -- that raised the bar for dissolving libraries. The major premise of the bill requires petitions for dissolution support from at least 25% or more of the eligible voters residing in the library district. This provision did not exist in current law which left libraries vulnerable.

WLA worked with the Secretary of State in reviewing the bill language and testified in both the House and Senate committees. The bill passed 44-5 in the Senate and 90-5 in the House. Governor Inslee signed it into law and it goes into effect on June 6 of this year.

**Addressing School Book Bans**

In response to growing actions attempting to remove books and materials in schools, WLA worked with Rep. Monica Stonier, the WEA, and Mom’s Rising to pass a bill creating a standardized process to better govern policies dealing with book and material removals in schools.

[ESSHB 2331](https://app.leg.wa.gov/billsummary?BillNumber=2331&Year=2023&Initiative=false) which passed on party line votes – 29-20 in the Senate and 57-38 in the House – requires that school district board of directors cannot remove materials from classrooms or school libraries if the education materials pertain to individuals or groups that are part of a protected class in public school nondiscrimination provisions. The bill also requires that all Instructional Materials Committees (IMC) must have at least one parent and must have outreach programs in place to recruit a diverse pool of parents that reflect the school’s demographics. The IMCs must also provide recommendations for culturally and experientially representative instructional materials, including materials on the study of the role and contributions of individuals or groups who are part of a protected class. The bill also requires districts to make specific policies creating a written process and mechanisms for complaints and resolving complaints for instructional materials.

For Supplemental Materials – such as those in the school libraries – starting with the 25-26 school year, each school board must adopt or revise policies and procedures governing reviews and removals that must include:

* A summary of provisions barring prohibitions for supplemental materials
* Requiring that the process for review and potential removal be in writing from a parent and submitted to the appropriate staff – either the teacher, teacher-librarian or principal
* A mechanism that seeks to resolve requests for review and potential removal at the school building level through a meeting with the parent, the teacher or teacher-librarian and the school principal
* Requiring, if not resolution can be agreed upon, the principal to provide a written decision within specified time frames after review of the materials and consultation with a teacher-librarian, if one is available.
* A process for appealing the principal’s decision either by the parent, the teacher or the teacher-librarian to the superintendent of the school district or their designee. Appeal requests must be made in writing and the superintendent’s decision is not subject to appeal. The decisions may be limited in application to only the students or students of the parent who submitted the complaint.
* All final decisions made at any point may not be reconsidered for a minimum of three years.

WLA supported the bill because a consistent and identifiable process is sorely needed. However, WLA is concerned with the allowance for a single principal or superintendent to make the final decision. In addition, we would like to see no removal of books until final decisions are in place. Also, with the continued cuts of teacher-librarians, districts are losing the trained staff who can effectively help with developing these policies – which could have negative effects on successful implementation. WLA had amendments to make these changes but the political nature of this bill, combined with the difficulties keep bad amendments from passing, meant that changes were minimized in the end. We will be working at the district level and with WSSDA to develop policies. We will also be vigilant regarding the actual implementation and ready to work with legislators to make changes.

**What To Do About AI?**

The Legislature also passed [E2SSB 5838](https://app.leg.wa.gov/billsummary?BillNumber=5838&Initiative=false&Year=2023), which establishes a task force on Artificial Intelligence. The Task Force is to assess currently uses and trends by private and public sector entities and make recommendations regarding standards and regulations of AI. After much consternation and debate over size of the task force and who would be on it, the Legislature landed on creating an Executive Committee comprised of one member from each of the following:

* The Governor’s Office
* The Office of the Attorney General
* Washington Technology Solutions
* The State Auditor
* Universities or research institutions that are experts in the design and effect of algorithmic systems
* Private technology groups
* A business association
* The LBGTQ+ community
* The retail industry
* The hospitality industry
* A statewide labor organization
* Public Safety
* In addition, there will be three members representing community advocate organizations that represent vulnerable communities.

The Executive Committee will be expected to convene subcommittees comprised of experts and relevant stakeholders to advise the task for on designated topics.

The Committee was able to start it’s work on March 18 and will be providing reports on December 1, 2024, December 1, 2025 and July 1, 2026.

**Other Bills of Note**

[E2SHB 2354](https://app.leg.wa.gov/billsummary?BillNumber=2354&Year=2023) – This bill created an option for impacted taxing districts, including library districts, to provide a portion of their new revenue to support any tax increment area proposed within their jurisdiction and clarified that a tax increment area must be dissolved when all bond obligations are paid. Tax increment financing is an important tool for local governments to fund necessary public infrastructure in targeted areas. However, the bill became controversial when it removed the ability for junior taxing districts to have input. The final bill requires involvement from junior taxing districts.

[2SSB 5444](https://app.leg.wa.gov/billsummary?BillNumber=5444&Year=2023) – This places additional restrictions on weapons in public places, including libraries. It is a gross misdemeanor under this bill for an individual to enter a library (or zoo or transit station) while knowingly possessing a weapon unless they hold a valid conceal carry license. WLA members had mixed feelings about this depending on location around the state and the lack of staff/facilities to actually enforce the provision. Visible signage and discussions with local law enforcement will be important for compliance and enforcement.

[ESSB 5778](https://app.leg.wa.gov/billsummary?BillNumber=5788&Year=2023) – This bill provides the same protections and requirements for service animals to service animals in training. This will allow those training service animals to bring them into places of public accommodation as long as they are a dog or miniature horse, the trainer has control of the animal and the animal meets behavior requirements. It is illegal to misrepresent an animal as a service animal trainee.

**Library Support in Budget**

* Capital Budget
* Republic Community Library - $183,000
* Republic Library and Community Center - $315,000
* Washington Masonic Services Library & Museum Remodel - $47,000
* Langley Library Historic Preservation project - $600,000
* Seattle Public Library Holds Pick-Up Locker - $93,000
* Secretary of State – Financing contract for a new Library Archives building
* Operating budget
* Secretary of State - Washington State Library Account – increased to $14,765,000
* $133,000 of the general fund to the Department of Health to maintain a supply of naloxone in public libraries for emergency response. This funding may be used

(a) To supply naloxone directly to libraries; or

(b) As pass-through grants to libraries, for:

* (i) The development of partnerships with local public health agencies or other governmental entities;
* (ii) Purchases, delivery, and replacements of naloxone supply;
* (iii) Training employees; or
* (iv) Other activities and items that would ensure the availability of naloxone in the library.
* Increase from $1,000,000 to $1,500,000 for the year 2025 for the Imagination Library
* Library materials MSOC rates increased from $22.65 in 23-24 school year to $23.09 in 24-25 school year.

**What’s Ahead in 2025?**

The next legislative session will occur after a very busy election year. Several statewide offices have open seats, as well as at least 14 seats in the Legislature. With three initiatives on the ballot, all of these open seats, legislators moving from the House to run for open seats in the Senate, we won’t really know what the Legislature’s priorities will be until mid-November or early December. However, WLA knows it will be working on the following:

* Digital content contracts
* Funding for school libraries and teacher-librarians as well as ensuring they are available to all students
* Continued funding for digital equity
* Media literacy, digital citizenship and the impact of AI
* Early learning and literacy
* Better funding for the public library capital improvement fund

YOUR ACTION NEEDED: Between now and next January, be sure to participate in any questionnaires and activities from WLA about library priorities; invite legislators and candidates in to see what you do in your library; get to know who is running for both your home and work legislative districts and make sure they know that you are a resource for them on library issues; and VOTE!