



Wednesday, April 29, 2015

Re: Supporting Our Public Employees

Dear Honorable Representatives and Senators,

We, the undersigned individuals and organizations, value quality public services and the people who proudly provide them. Public employees are our friends, neighbors and family members who keep our communities safe, support our seniors and people with disabilities, teach and protect our children, provide quality and meaningful higher education opportunities, maintain our roads and transportation system, protect us from communicable diseases, provide critical mental health services, ensure we have clean water to drink, provide us with electricity in our homes, maintain our parks, and provide essential services. As you continue to work through the differences between the House and Senate versions of the budget, we ask that you support the collective bargaining agreements for public employees who support our communities.

The recession hurt all of us. The *Center for American Progress* reported that the Great Recession produced widespread employment losses for communities of color and Caucasian families alike—losses that have yet to be overcome amid the still tentative economic recovery.<sup>1</sup> They further found that “racial and ethnic differences have worsened or stayed the same during the recession and recovery, and trends for poverty rates, health insurance coverage, and retirement savings also show widening gaps by race and ethnicity throughout the recession and recovery after 2007.” Public employees have helped families weather the recession by helping to provide essential housing support, food assistance, childcare, healthcare, education, transportation, and facilitating minority and women owned businesses accessing public contracts. These efforts, and the public employees who provide these services, are essential for local economies and communities to create greater shared prosperity.

Now that the economy has improved, we must keep our promise to rebuild vital programs and infrastructure, and along with that is a commitment to fund public sector workers who are on the front line. The Governor, the House of Representatives, and a clear bipartisan majority of Senators want to keep that promise by approving and fully funding

public employee contracts. These workers live in our cities and towns, and the work they perform helps us all live better lives. Throughout the recession, our state government asked these workers to do more for less, with the promise that in the future, things would get better for them and their families. For seven years, state employees have not had a general pay increase, but the cost-of-living has continued to rise so these families have had to cut back.

By supporting our public sector workers' collective bargaining agreements, you will be investing in our communities and ensuring that we protect important public functions for the general public as well as those who are most marginalized. Public sector workers, and their families, are important members of our communities. The public supports public sector workers and the services they provide. The [latest Elway Poll](#) finds that a strong majority in Washington say they oppose balancing the state budget on the backs of state employees again -- saying they were "opposed" or found it "unacceptable" to continue to deny raises.<sup>ii</sup>

Unfortunately, there are several proposals that have been introduced as facets of the budget conversation which we believe threaten our friends and neighbors who work for Washington State. We ask that you oppose attempts to adopt a budget that threatens these important elements of our communities' livelihoods by supporting the following proposals:

- **Approve and Fully Fund Collective Bargaining Agreements and Educator COLAs** – the agreements reached by public sector workers, their unions, and the State should be fully funded. The Senate's proposal would short these workers by over \$325 million – money that would otherwise be spent in our communities. This includes state employees, higher education employees, teachers, homecare workers, and childcare workers.
- **Protect Spousal Healthcare** – The Senate budget would kick the spouses of public sector workers off of healthcare without even assessing whether the spouse has access to affordable or quality benefits through their own employers. It would create a bifurcated healthcare situation where members of the same family might have to see different family practice physicians in different facilities. Families should have the option of being covered by the same plan, and manage their care needs together.
- **Protect Retirement Savings for Homecare Workers** – All workers should have access to retirement programs. Homecare workers who support our elders and people with disabilities in times of medical strain have negotiated a modest, private retirement savings plan. The Legislature should be promoting these kinds of programs for workers who don't have them. Yet, the Senate budget eliminates this provision of their contract, and that's wrong.
- **Protect Retirees** by maintaining healthcare funding.
- **Maintain Collective Bargaining** – Some legislators have expressed a desire to restrict collective bargaining for our public workers. Collective bargaining is the best way for workers and their bosses to dig deep in to the nuances of the work they perform to achieve fair and sustainable hours, wages, and working conditions. Budget negotiators should not hold hostage these contracts for changes in the bargaining process.

By supporting these workers, you will be making positive investments in our communities that will ripple through our businesses, faith organizations, neighborhoods, and schools. You will be helping to grow and strengthen middle-class families, lift low-income families out of poverty, and ensure that communities of color have more access to economic opportunities. We support our public sector workers, because these employees support us. We ask that you do the same by opposing attacks on the public sector workers and fund the collective bargaining agreements.

Sincerely,

Action DD  
American Muslims of Puget Sound  
APACE (c4)  
Asian Pacific Islander Coalition  
Seth Armstrong, Former State Representative  
Behavior Health and Wellness  
Casa Latina  
Center for Justice  
El Centro de la Raza  
Economic Opportunity Institute  
Faith Action Network  
Friends Committee on Washington Public Policy  
Health Care for All Washington  
Islamic Civic Engagement Project  
Jefferson County Citizens for Healthcare Access  
Latino Community Fund  
Legal Voice  
LGBTQ Allyship  
NARAL Pro-Choice Washington  
OCA-Asian Pacific American Advocates  
OneAmerica  
Physicians for a National Health Program  
Progreso: Latino Progress  
Puget Sound Sage  
Puget Sound Advocates for Retirement Action  
Retired Public Employees Council, RPEC  
Jack Smith, Concerned Citizen  
Southwest Youth and Family Services  
Statewide Poverty Action Network  
Transit Riders Union  
Washington Community Action Network  
Washington Low Income Housing Alliance  
Washington State Association for Justice  
Washington State Budget and Policy Center  
WA State and India Trade Relations Committee  
Washington State Senior Citizens Lobby  
Win/Win Action

American Federation of Teachers, Washington  
Certified Electrical Workers of Washington, IBEW 46  
International Association of Machinists, Grand Lodge 751  
IBEW, Local 77  
International Longshore and Warehouse Union, Puget Sound District  
Council  
Martin Luther King Jr. County Central Labor Council, AFL-CIO  
Pierce County Central Labor Council, AFL-CIO  
Professional and Technical Employees, Local 17  
SEIU, Local 6  
SEIU, Local 775  
SEIU, Local 925  
SEIU, Local 1199NW  
Sheet Metal, Air, Rail, and Transportation Workers  
Sheet Metal Workers, Local 66  
Society of Professional Engineering Employees in Aerospace, IFPTE 2001  
Teamsters, Joint Council 28  
Teamsters, Local 117  
United Faculty of Washington State  
United Food and Commercial Workers, Local 21  
United Food and Commercial Workers, Local 367  
United Food and Commercial Workers, Washington United Council  
Washington Federation of State Employees, AFSCME Council 28  
Washington Public Employees Association  
Washington State Association of UA Plumbers and Pipefitters  
Washington State Building and Construction Trades Council  
Washington State Council of County and City Employees, AFSCME Council 2  
Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO  
Washington State Nurses Association

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/economy/report/2011/01/21/8881/the-state-of-communities-of-color-in-the-u-s-economy/>

<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.seattlemet.com/news-and-profiles/publicola/articles/new-elway-poll-shows-voters-split-on-state-budget-proposals-april-2015>