

# 2017 Legislative Wrap-up

# 27<sup>th</sup> District

## PROTECTING SERVICES FOR THE MOST VULNERABLE AMONG US

In every budget cycle there is a battle to protect critical services for low-income individuals, families, and those living with disabilities.

This year was no different; however, we are proud of the hard work, dedication, and success we accomplished as Democrats in the House and Senate who fought to maintain funding for the most vulnerable in the budget. This means that **programs assisting at-risk homeless youth, the Aged/Blind/Disabled program, the Housing and Essential Needs (HEN) program, and the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families budgets kept their funding at current levels or received a modest increase.** We were able to maintain the document recording fee, which helps **fund many of the anti-homelessness programs across our state.** In our community, these funds are typically used for rent assistance to help keep people experiencing homelessness in stable housing. With nearly 40,000 homeless children in our schools, we have more work to do to make sure that we are compassionately addressing and balancing the needs of the individuals, the community, and our state.



Access to quality mental health care services also remained a priority for us this session. We fought to improve state-run and community facilities, increase staffing levels, and reduce employee turnover. **We invested more than \$60 million into our state hospitals and more than \$27 million to community mental health services like long-term inpatient beds, and crisis walk-in centers.** Access to mental health services is foundational to public health and safety.

As a way to help improve services to at-risk youth and their families, the legislature approved the creation of a **new cabinet-level**

**state agency named the Department of Children, Youth & Families.** This agency will combine the work of the former Department of Early Learning, and the Children’s Administration within the Department of Social and Health Services by July 1, 2018. A year later, the new department will also include programs offered by the Juvenile Rehabilitation Office and the Office of Juvenile Justice. We want to make sure that all kids, youth, and their families have the tools necessary to succeed and thrive.

Sen. Jeannie Darneille  
Rep. Laurie Jenkins  
Rep. Jake Fey

P.O. Box 40600  
Olympia, WA 98504-0600

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## JOIN US FOR COMMUNITY CONVERSATION HOURS THIS FALL

We invite you to join us at one or more of our fall conversation hours in Tacoma. Bring your thoughts, questions, and concerns about state government or legislative issues.

**WHEN:** SATURDAY, OCTOBER 14TH, 12:00 TO 2:00 P.M.  
**WHERE:** Black Kettle Bites and Brew, 744 Market Street, Suite 102B

**WHEN:** THURSDAY, OCTOBER 19TH, 3:00 TO 5:00 P.M.  
**WHERE:** Red Elm Café, 1114 MLK Jr Way (meeting room in back reserved)

**WHEN:** TUESDAY, DECEMBER 12TH, 1:00 TO 3:00 P.M.  
**WHERE:** Salishan, 1701 East 44th Street (International Place Common Room)



## 27TH DISTRICT LEGISLATIVE UPDATE



Senator  
Jeannie Darneille



Representative  
Laurie Jenkins



Representative  
Jake Fey



**SEN. JEANNIE DARNEILLE**  
**Olympia Office:**  
237 John A. Cherberg Bldg.  
P.O. Box 40427  
Olympia, WA 98504-0427  
(360) 786-7652

**E-mail:**  
Jeannie.Darneille@leg.wa.gov

**REP. LAURIE JINKINS**  
**Olympia Office:**  
308 John L. O'Brien Bldg.  
PO Box 40600  
Olympia, WA 98504-0600  
(360) 786-7930

**District:** (253) 593-2033  
**E-mail:**  
Laurie.Jenkins@leg.wa.gov

**REP. JAKE FEY**  
**Olympia Office:**  
414 John L. O'Brien Bldg.  
PO Box 40600  
Olympia, WA 98504-0600  
(360) 786-7974  
**District:** (253) 593-2022  
**E-mail:**  
Jake.Fey@leg.wa.gov

**TOLL-FREE  
LEGISLATIVE HOTLINE:**  
800-562-6000  
**TTY:** 1-800-635-9993



Dear friends,  
  
We are honored to be able to work together as your state legislative delegation for the 27th district. This newsletter provides information about the work we’ve been doing this year and how it affects you.

As the 2017 legislative session began back in January, one of the biggest issues facing state lawmakers was finishing the job of fully funding our K-12 education system. We also needed to invest in our mental health system, in public health efforts like addressing the opioid crisis, in housing assistance to help combat homelessness, and in the many programs and services Washingtonians expect and deserve.

While it took longer than we would have liked, lawmakers were able to pass a new two-year budget for our state and avoid a state government shutdown, which would have had harmful consequences for families, our community, and our economy. All three of us pushed hard for a final budget that puts Washington’s families first and delivers on the promise to our state’s 1.1 million school kids.

More details about our education funding package, as well as other budget details – including transportation investments and the status of the state capital construction budget – can be found inside.

We want to be accessible to you, and that’s why we’re pleased to offer a series of informal conversation hours this fall in several locations around Tacoma. Details are on the back of this newsletter. Please join us and bring your questions, comments, and concerns. What we hear from you will help us plan ahead for the 2018 session, which is just around the corner. We hope to see you at one of these events.

Our best wishes,

*Jeannie Darneille*  
Sen. Jeannie Darneille

*LJ*  
Rep. Laurie Jenkins

*Jake Fey*  
Rep. Jake Fey





## HISTORIC INVESTMENTS IN K-12 EDUCATION

### No more excuses. No more delays.



Education funding has long been an issue state lawmakers have grappled with. We've been underfunding our K-12 public schools, creating massive inequities across school districts. Despite steady progress to increase state funding and address these inequities, there was one big thing left to do in 2017: end the reliance on local levies to pay teacher salaries.

The three of us were not going to settle for anything less than getting the job done. With a final budget that invests **\$7.3 billion into our schools over the next four years**, we're pleased to say state lawmakers delivered on their promise to Washington's school kids. **More than half the state operating budget is now dedicated to K-12 public schools.**

This historic investment not only fully funds teacher compensation, it also supports vital programs aimed at closing the opportunity gap by investing in:

- Learning assistance to help struggling students keep up with their peers
- Transitional programs to help bilingual students
- Class size reductions for career and technical education and skill centers
- Parent-involvement coordinators and guidance counselors

Additionally, we're addressing the teacher shortage our state is facing by increasing starting salaries for new teachers and funding more teacher professional development. These investments will help ensure a high quality teacher in every classroom.

### Where's the money coming from?

It is significant that this year in the legislature, both Republicans and Democrats acknowledged our state doesn't generate enough revenue to fund our kids' education without massive safety net cuts. These cuts would take our state in the wrong direction, impacting programs that address homelessness, help struggling families stay on their feet, and provide quality care for senior citizens and people with developmental disabilities. Both sides of the aisle proposed new revenue.

Senate Republicans proposed a large statewide property tax hike. Democrats proposed revenue options that were more progressive and better for working families, like a capital gains tax on wealthy investors and reforming the real estate excise tax to help lower- and middle-income homebuyers.



But nothing can be accomplished in a divided legislature without compromise. Both sides had to give. The final revenue package was a much lower property tax increase than Senate Republicans originally wanted. This increase coincides with a change to local schools levies, resulting in future property tax reductions in many school districts, including the Tacoma school district.

## Looking ahead

State lawmakers are aware of the concerns expressed by several school districts – including Tacoma – about the effect of the new state funding formula on their operations. While we are confident Tacoma schools are getting more money – not less – under the new formula, implementing such a big policy change in our state is likely to have some challenges along the way. We are working with our legislative colleagues, staff, the state Superintendent, and school districts to better

understand the impacts of this change. Any unforeseen negative impacts will be addressed by the legislature.

Additionally, we will continue to propose sustainable solutions to address our state's regressive tax system. At our town hall meeting last March, we heard from many of you who are frustrated that poor and working families in our state pay a higher share of their income in taxes than wealthy families pay. Our economy needs to work for everyone, not favor the wealthy few.

## BUILDING A BETTER WASHINGTON AND CREATING JOBS

Pierce County is one of the fastest-growing counties in the nation. That's great news—but it also comes with challenges, including more cars on I-5 and the need to build new schools and colleges for every family moving here.

Building new infrastructure is therefore crucial for our economy and quality of life. That's where the state's transportation and capital construction budgets come into play.



### Transportation

The good news is we passed a new transportation budget that will help you get around, whether you rely on highways, ferries, buses, trains, or bicycles.

That budget has more than \$8 billion in funding, including key local projects to:

- Complete the I-5 project that will extend carpool lanes to the Tacoma Mall;
- Improve our highways and finish projects like the new bridges over I-5 near the Tacoma Dome;
- Complete the fourth 144-car ferry;
- Invest in buses, light rail, and bike paths;
- Add more incident response trucks, which help motorists and clear the traffic logjams that come with every stopped car on the side of the road, whether it's because of an accident, a flat tire, or engine failure;
- Provide fair compensation for workers like our State Troopers, who we kept losing to other agencies;
- Appropriations for accelerated land acquisition for the State Route 167 / 509 Puget Sound Gateway Project, which will make a big difference here in Pierce County; and
- Funds for Pierce Transit for rapid transit bus service on Pacific Avenue.

With more and more people moving to Tacoma and working in King County, we have to be innovative in finding ways to reduce traffic on I-5 and give people



alternative ways of getting around. If you have an idea, big or small, on how to make the daily commute better, please get in touch. This issue will only become more important as our population grows.

### Capital construction budget

House Democrats, Senate Republicans, House Republicans and Senate Democrats agreed to a \$4.2 billion construction budget that would put a record \$1 billion into building schools and \$800 million toward colleges and universities.

Even though there's an agreement, and the last vote (92-1 in the House) was overwhelmingly bipartisan, we're sorry to report that Senate Republicans refused to vote on the construction budget until there's an agreement on legislation regarding water policy in about nine rural counties.

That's unfortunate. The construction and transportation budgets have always been bipartisan, benefiting every district in the state. The lack of a capital budget is affecting existing construction jobs and will lead to increased costs to taxpayers. School districts, city councils, and county governments, are all feeling the pain as they struggle without the promised funding from the state.

Here in the 27th District, a total of \$47.4 million in projects are still in limbo. That includes:

- \$1 million for the Pantages Theater;
- \$2.5 million for Tacoma Community House;
- \$3 million for the Multicare/Fransiscan joint venture to increase mental health capacity;
- \$1.5 million at University of Washington-Tacoma;
- \$1 million for the Tacoma Art Museum;
- \$3 million for the Tacoma Housing Authority's Arlington Drive Youth Campus; and
- \$2.55 million for the Eastside Community Center.

Just as we must fund transportation to keep our state moving forward, we must also fund community infrastructure projects that provide family-wage jobs.

New investments in transportation and construction projects are necessary to keep pace with our increasing population. We must enforce our long-standing commitment to build a better Washington and preserve the legacies of our parents and grandparents who invested in schools, colleges, parks, and better opportunities.