

2026 State Legislative Priorities

The **City of Auburn**, like most communities, faces a number of issues that impact our community. What is becoming very clear, we cannot treat each issue as separate. Instead, the City is committed to continue efforts that look at solving our challenges in a comprehensive manner. Our belief is that the following problems can only be solved with an interconnected strategy for success.

PUBLIC SAFETY

ISSUE: The City of Auburn supports the continued reforms to policing and community caretaking in our State and wishes to further work in concert with legislators, police officers, our communities and others on this effort.



REQUEST: Work with cities to make technical fixes those bills in which language is vague, conflicting or confusing. Specific language on interviewing juveniles regarding their involvement in criminal activities.

ISSUE: Police agencies are currently in a staffing crisis. As we seek to fill vacated positions, we will need tools to ensure our departments are fully staffed and able to effectively respond to local public safety needs.

REQUEST: Additional funding for officer wellness, recruitment and retention within police agencies.

REQUEST: Funding sources could include impact fees or direct funding from the state.

ISSUE: Ongoing public safety issues related to illegal drug use.

REQUEST: Restore drug free school zones and expand to community parks.

REQUEST: Ongoing funding for therapeutic courts, recovery programs in jails and after treatment supports.

ISSUE: Flock Camera usage.

REQUEST: Work to minimize changes to the use of FLOCK or other ALPR equipment while providing protections regarding disclosure of DV or other crime victim information. Work on language that provides guidelines for use.

ISSUE: Indigent Defense – Compliance with New Case-Load Caps.

Washington Supreme Court–mandated reductions in public defense case-loads create significant unfunded mandates for cities, requiring additional attorneys and higher contract costs amid a shrinking defense workforce.

REQUEST: Provide sustained state funding and workforce support for indigent defense. The City of Auburn requests ongoing state funding to help cities comply with new case-load standards and investment in workforce development, including recruitment incentives and loan-repayment programs.

PUBLIC WORKS, TRANSPORTATION, INFRASTRUCTURE

ISSUE: It is critical to protect all of the State funds that support local transportation and infrastructure projects. The cities cannot do this on their own given the amount of growth and commerce in the region.



REQUEST: Support maintaining/increasing funding for the Transportation Improvement Board (TIB), Freight Mobility Strategic Investment Board (FMSIB), WSDOT state grant programs, Public Works Trust Fund, and Drinking Water State Revolving Fund.

SOCIAL SERVICES

ISSUE: Cities throughout the state do not have the local resources available to adequately address homelessness, substance abuse disorders and untreated mental illness.



REQUEST: Make any necessary changes to State laws that prohibit cities from hiring Mental Health Professionals or Designated Crisis Responders.

REQUEST: Support the construction and operation of tiny home villages that provide permanent supportive housing using a community living concept.

ISSUE: South King County is facing a growing affordable housing crisis.

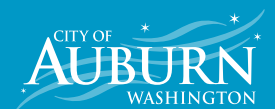
As a member of the South King Housing and Homelessness Partners (SKHHP) and South Sound Housing Affordability Partners (SSHAP), we pool funds with other cities to support the production and preservation of affordable housing in South King County and Pierce County, but we need more help.

REQUEST: In order to address this crisis, we need to fund all aspects of affordable housing, including:

- Preservation of naturally occurring affordable housing (NOAH)
- Land acquisition to secure permanent affordability
- Permanent supportive housing (PSH)
- Funding for the expansion of Shelter space regionally.

Contact Us

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LABOR & WORKFORCE IMPACTS

ISSUE: Washington Paid Family & Medical Leave (PFML)
– Redundant Costs, Lack of Oversight, and Impacts on Essential Services.



Municipal governments already provide robust paid leave, disability benefits, and federal FMLA protections, making PFML a duplicative and costly mandate for both cities and municipal employees. Cities have no authority to audit PFML claims or verify reported hours, leaving employers unable to deter misuse or assist the State in protecting program solvency. The ability to stack PFML with federal FMLA has resulted in extended absences beyond the program's original intent, including for non-serious conditions, creating staffing shortages and operational risks in essential public services with minimum staffing and 24/7/365 requirements, such as police, fire, and emergency response.

REQUEST:

- Allow municipal governments that already offer equivalent or superior leave benefits to opt out of mandatory PFML participation to avoid duplicative payroll taxes.
- Establish employer audit and verification authority to strengthen accountability and long-term program solvency.
- Refocus PFML eligibility and usage on serious medical and family-care needs consistent with the program's core purpose.

ISSUE: Escalating Tort Liability Costs Threaten Municipal Fiscal Stability.

Washington cities face growing and unsustainable liability exposure driven by current tort laws, including joint and several liability, phantom medical damages, and unchecked jury anchoring. WCIA paid over \$70 million in claims in 2024, with reinsurance premiums increasing 750 percent over the past decade. These laws allow cities to be targeted as deep-pocket defendants, often paying judgments disproportionate to fault, while inflated medical damages and unsupported non-economic damage anchors drive verdicts far beyond actual losses. Rising liability costs increase taxpayer exposure and force reductions in public services.

REQUEST: Enact Targeted Tort Reforms to Protect Taxpayers.

The City of Auburn requests targeted tort reforms consistent with other states, including:

- Modifying joint and several liability to limit municipal responsibility to proportionate fault or economic damages only.
- Eliminating phantom damages by limiting medical damages to amounts actually paid or legitimately owed.
- Reforming jury anchoring practices to prohibit unsupported non-economic damage figures not tied to evidence.

Other Important Items to Watch include:

- Funding for Transportation Needs
- Affordable Housing
- Building Code Cycle
- Towing Costs related to Seattle v. Long decision
- Protect and Maintain Parks and Open Spaces
- eBike and eMotorcycle Regulations in Parks and on Trails
- Increasing the 1% Property Tax Cap

Mayor

Nancy Backus

Deputy Mayor

Tracy Taylor

Councilmembers

Kate Baldwin

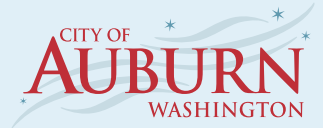
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