

2023

# Bold actions for building a stronger Washington



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Text as prepared

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# 2023 State of the State Address

## Governor Jay Inslee

“Bold actions for building a stronger Washington”

As prepared for delivery at noon, Jan. 10, 2023  
State Reception Room, Washington State Capitol

Good afternoon, and thank you to our inspiring guests and performers — Father Andriy Matlak, Poet Laureate Rena Priest and the Tacoma Refugee Choir.

You remind us that the people have given us a tremendous responsibility, and that we hold a unwavering flame of optimism that lights our way forward.

A very warm welcome and congratulations to our 29 newly elected senators and representatives.

And I want to give my deep appreciation to Trudi Inslee, who is such a great partner, and to my entire family who are a daily inspiration to my work as governor.

Mr. President, Madam Speaker, Mr. Chief Justice, distinguished justices of the court, members of the Legislature, tribal leaders, state and local government officials, members of the Consular Corps, and my fellow Washingtonians.

After two years of delivering the State of the State virtually, it is great to be back here together again.

I know we have big challenges. As leaders, we will be called upon these next few months to act with decisiveness, ambition and audacity.

The good news is that here in Washington state, ambition and audacity is in our DNA.

As I thought about the challenges we face this session, I realized we aren't facing anything we aren't ready for.

## Governor Jay Inslee

It was powerful for me to reflect on the things we passed in recent years that are now becoming real, at a time we know that people are eager to see bold and inclusive leadership and action.

Five years ago, we launched a transformation of our century-old behavioral health system. Today, that effort is resulting in dozens of new facilities opening throughout the state that offer more kinds of care in more places for more people.

Two years ago, we funded a new type of rapid acquisition housing program. It is speeding up our ability to create supportive housing in a matter of weeks and months, instead of years and decades.

The climate policies we passed in recent sessions are now going into effect. Not only are these policies driving down polluting emissions, they are also creating thousands of clean energy jobs across the state.

Two years ago, we passed a Working Families Tax Credit that starts next month. This credit will put as much as \$1,200 into the hands of more than 400,000 Washington families.

The list goes on: paid family leave, broadband access, career connected learning and the best financial aid program in the country.

We invest in our people and our communities.

It's a reason we've been rated best state in America, best economy, second best state for business, third best state for workers — we can't be number one in everything, but we sure come close.

This is not an accident. That's because of the work we do in these chambers.

Because of that work, I can proudly report that the state of our state is strong.

If we continue building on the investments and policies we've started, we can continue building a Washington:

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Where everyone is housed.

Where our schools are safe from gun violence, and students receive the mental and educational support they need.

Where the existential crisis of climate change is met by unmatched innovation.

Where communities feel welcoming and safe to all.

Where all people have a constitutional right to reproductive freedom.

And, where people struggling with mental health or substance use no longer fall unseen and unheard through the cracks.

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Building a Washington that fits this vision is entirely within our grasp. We can set the bar this high because we know we're able to achieve it.

Let's take housing and homelessness as an example.

States across the country are seeing an increase in homelessness, and Washington is one of them.

Why? There are multiple reasons. Though some people face behavioral health challenges or chemical addiction issues, the fundamental, underlying challenge is that we don't have enough housing.

It's a difficult irony of having a strong economy. Well-paid workers flock here for jobs, forcing lower-paid workers to compete for housing.

When there's not enough housing for all, rents and prices skyrocket beyond what many can afford.

Until we fix our housing crisis, thousands of people will remain homeless.

## Governor Jay Inslee

Today, we're short 81,000 housing units and worsening by the thousands every year.

Our population grew nearly 1 million people in the past decade. Housing stock only grew about 315,000 units. We need another million units in the next 17 years.

Again, until we fix our housing crisis, thousands of people will remain homeless.

And we need a fix that provides a level of speed and scale beyond anything we've done.

When it comes to building affordable housing, our Housing Trust Fund has been our primary tool for decades.

Unfortunately, we can only adjust that dial a little bit here and there. And we've been adjusting it up every biennium since 2013 — \$30-\$50 million at a time.

It isn't enough. If there was ever a time to go big, it's now.

I understand the frustration of those who wonder why this problem isn't solved yet. And I understand the allure of easy answers to homelessness.

But there is no easy answer. Simply moving a person experiencing homelessness from one street corner or city to another is not a real solution.

What is working are efforts such as the rapid acquisition program we launched two years ago. That program is allowing us now to create thousands of new supportive housing units at a pace that was never possible before. This is a pace we must sustain.

I've seen the success in several housing projects I've visited, including a few months ago when I met a young man named Sjon Tori Mackey at a pallet shelter village in Vancouver called The Outpost.

Tori told me that having a private space all his own and access to services was the difference he needed to receive treatment and get back on his feet. He told me this literally saved his life.

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I also met a woman named Millicent, and her daughter, McKenna, last year. They lost their home right before COVID-19 and couldn't find another place she could afford. But they found stability at Willow Crossing in Seattle.

I'd like all of you to meet Tori, Millicent and McKenna as well. They are here today.

Their stories are not unlike most of the other 25,000 individuals experiencing homelessness in our state.

When you're one paycheck or one car repair away from a missed rent payment, it can feel impossible to find another option in a housing market like ours.

I'll say it again: Until we fix our housing crisis, thousands of people will remain homeless.

This is why I'm proposing a \$4 billion referendum that will significantly speed up the construction of thousands of new units that will include shelters, supportive housing and affordable housing.

This will be combined with additional behavioral health support, substance use treatment, employment services and more.

Why? Because we know that substance use treatment and mental health support can work when you combine it with stable housing.

This is not a one-time effort to buy a one-time fix where the money disappears.

This money will turn into true assets that, once built, will provide a pipeline of affordable housing for tens of thousands of more people every year.

And most importantly, a bonding referendum allows us to act now — not bit by bit over the next 30 years.

This referendum will fast-forward our ability to build. Importantly, it offers us the scale and speed we need.

## Governor Jay Inslee

Scale and speed are necessary for market-rate development, too. Residential zoning restrictions block private developers from building denser and more affordable options.

We must finish the job we started last session to address middle housing and increase housing density within our communities.

There is a way to do this that respects the unique character of our towns and cities, while also responding to the reality that we are a growing, changing state.

Again, until we fix our housing crisis, thousands of people will remain homeless.

The people are with us on this. Let's go big. Let's get this done.

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The other issue confronting families and communities across Washington is behavioral health.

I mentioned that we launched an effort in 2018 to transform our behavioral health system. We had a century-old model of care that wasn't working.

Since then, we've been building a new, community-based system that helps people get the specific type of care they need closer to their homes and loved ones.

Community-based care is what works.

We've made thousands of new beds available to patients across Washington for care that ranges from crisis stabilization to substance use disorder.

We're still building, and my budgets contain funding to keep every part of our plan on track, including the new 350-bed forensic hospital at Western State.

But much like our housing crisis, this is not enough, particularly when it comes to forensic services.



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We're seeing an unprecedented increase in demand for competency evaluation and restoration services – a 60% increase in court orders since 2018, and a 145% increase in inpatient referrals since 2013.

This is not sustainable.

The state has been and will continue doing its part to shore up capacity. We've added hundreds of forensic beds since the Trueblood trial in 2015, and we plan to add hundreds more.

But even with all these investments, this exponential growth in court orders and referrals is not manageable or sustainable. Nor is our criminal justice system an effective way to connect people to the treatment they need.

We should be prioritizing diversion and community-based treatment options rather than using the criminal justice system as an avenue to mental health care, particularly because competency services only treat people to be well enough for prosecution.

This has been a frustrating point of contention for families, lawyers, judges, patients, advocates, providers and for me.

We must find a better way. Lawsuits and lawyers will not fix this.

I will ask local leaders to join me in crafting a better plan, both for defendants' mental health and for public safety.

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And while we do these things, we're also continuing our efforts in education.

Meeting the social and emotional needs of our students has been an important effort, and I commend this Legislature for making historic investments last year to increase funding for schools so they can hire more nurses, counselors, psychologists and social workers.

## Governor Jay Inslee

My budget continues these additional investments.

I'm also hopeful we can increase funding for special education. I've proposed more than \$120 million to better support school districts as they meet the needs of every student they serve, no matter how complex the needs.

All told, my budget proposal increases K-12 spending by \$3 billion.

We know that circumstances have been difficult for students, educators, paraeducators, school bus drivers and others who work in our schools. Please join me in a moment of recognition for all those people who have been so instrumental in helping students navigate the challenges of COVID-19 and beyond.

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On another positive note, one effort we've made tremendous progress on is climate.

When we see the tremendous damage climate change is causing in our state, it's understandable to feel some despair. But I think we're also entitled to feel deep pride in what we're accomplishing together.

The tremendous pace of innovation, together with the policies we've adopted, ought to give us a significant dose of hope.

When I travel and meet with other government leaders from around the world, they know about the work we're doing in Washington.

We've passed several landmark policies that are transitioning us to clean transportation, clean electricity and clean buildings. Just last week, our clean fuel standard and cap-and-invest programs went into effect.

And we're doing this in a way that ensures overburdened communities will experience the economic and health benefits of this transition.

Now, our focus must shift to implementation and investment.

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We need more capacity to site and permit clean energy projects in a timely manner, and we need to bolster our transmission infrastructure to reliably deliver clean energy throughout the state.

We also need to expand our research and development capacity.

It was fantastic to join Senators Joe Nguyen and Matt Boehnke in Tri-Cities last month to talk about the potential for a new Institute for Northwest Energy Futures at Washington State University. This institute will put the region at the global forefront of clean tech innovation.

On the investment side, the Climate Commitment Act (CCA) we passed in 2021 is now live. Our state's new cap-and-invest program will allow us, this year, to transform how we invest in transportation and our communities.

Heat pumps for low-income families, charging stations across the state, hybrid-electric ferries, free transit for youth, grants to clean up air pollution — the list goes on.

The CCA will provide an estimated \$1.7 billion that we will use for projects to drive down emissions, create jobs and make communities healthier.

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The act is also helping us invest in the strongest suite of salmon recovery actions in state history. Salmon are iconic to our state, and to tribes' cultures and way of life.

This will also fund a new voluntary riparian grant program that offers landowners assistance to protect and recover these habitats statewide.

Unfortunately, climate change will continue increasing the temperatures of our waters and killing salmon. Providing shade that helps cool rivers and streams is even more critical for the years to come.

## Governor Jay Inslee

As legislators, when future generations look back at your efforts 40-50 years from now, I know they will be proud you took action that gave their generation a chance.

So, let's do just that. Let's boldly continue our fight against climate change and salmon extinction this year.

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I know the list of things to accomplish during this session is long, but there are a couple more I want to touch on. The first is public safety.

That phrase – public safety – evokes different meanings and ideas among people. We need to escape the trap that public safety is about any one thing – mental health or gun safety or drug treatment or law enforcement. The fact is, we need them all.

One thing we know is that gun violence is a significant driver of increased crime. This isn't a surprise considering the gun lobby has worked for decades against commonsense gun safety measures.

Fortunately, in Washington state, voters and legislators have been willing to take on the gun lobby. We've enacted several measures to strengthen background checks and limits on the kinds of weaponry used in mass shootings.

This year, we must continue that work in three ways.

One of the most meaningful measures we can take is requiring that people have safety training before they purchase a gun.

We expect that people have completed safety training in multiple parts of our lives. We should expect that before someone buys a gun they have some basic safety training. It has worked in other states. It's time to put it to work in Washington.

Second, we must increase accountability among manufacturers and dealers, and give families and victims access to justice when those entities fail to do their duty.

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And third, the time has come for this Legislature to ban the sale of military-style assault weapons. These weapons are designed for the sole purpose of destroying lives — the lives of school children, law enforcement officers, concert-goers, nightclub patrons, and people gathered in houses of worship.

We owe our children the assurance we're doing all we can to keep them safe. Let's pass all three bills and prove to them that the gun lobby doesn't make the rules in Washington state — we do.

Of course, gun safety laws are not the only thing we need. We want to help local law enforcement agencies hire and train more officers.

Last summer, Sen. John Lovick and I were joined by dozens of chiefs and sheriffs to propose new regional training centers. These new facilities will allow us to train hundreds more recruits, and help law enforcement agencies recruit people from within their diverse communities.

Sometimes, though, the right response isn't from law enforcement. I applaud the incredible work underway to implement our new 9-8-8 system.

Unlike most states, this Legislature had the foresight to see this as much more than a crisis hotline. We're using this opportunity to create a true behavioral health crisis response system.

Your continued support puts us on a path to ensure people facing a mental health, substance use or suicidal crisis can be connected to mobile responders or culturally-competent behavioral health providers.

Thank you for making this work possible.

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There is one other important priority we must address, and that's the rights of Washingtonians seeking reproductive care.

## Governor Jay Inslee

The Dobbs decision last year on the national level upended decades of precedent that assured people across the country had at least some measure of constitutional protection for abortion care and contraception.

That protection is gone for more than half the people in our country. And the new Republican majority in Congress this weekend made further abortion restrictions one of their top priorities.

So, in Washington state, we are fighting to make sure that right remains protected.

We must protect patient data and privacy.

We must protect access from the threat of health care consolidation and cost barriers.

We must protect patients and providers from persecution by vigilantes and activist politicians in anti-choice states.

And we must pass a constitutional amendment that expressly establishes a fundamental right to reproductive freedom in Washington state.

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Before I close, I want to express my personal thanks to you and your families, for your service this session.

You have each left your hearth and home to come here to serve your constituents and further the progress and success of our state. And when you do so, you will strive and toil to enact policies, and yet may never know many of the actual people you've helped.

You may never know the single mom you've helped out of homelessness, but she'll be there.

You may never know the teenager in a mental health crisis that you've helped, but they'll be there.

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You may never know the person who was not a victim of gun violence because of your actions, but they'll be there.

They'll all be there by the hundreds and thousands.

And at the end of this session, I am confident you will feel the deep satisfaction of those who know they have made a difference.

We have emerged through two great threats — one to our personal health, and one to our body politic.

Because of the combination of scientific genius and sound decision-making, we are no longer dominated by a virus.

Because we stood up to those who dared to dismantle democracy, it is a joy to say today that democracy is intact in Washington state.

So, now, it is our blessed opportunity to fully exercise the power of democracy, not with half measures, empty gestures or platitudes. But with the boldness and ambition that is fitting to the unlimited capacity of our Evergreen State.

We have a special state. We have a special moment. Let us realize both.

So, let's get to work.

Thank you.

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