WASHINGTON WORKFORCE ASSOCIATION

2027 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

Workforce Solutions for Washington State

Local Workforce Development Boards: talent strategy for every region

Washington's 12 Local Workforce Development Boards are business-led and focused on one job: building the talent each regional economy needs to grow. They bring employers, colleges, K-12, labor, economic development, and state agencies to one table, set sector strategies, and align training with what industry needs.

Boards braid federal, state, and local funds to get it done. As federal work requirements arrive and the state budget tightens, local boards are ready to help. This agenda protects and grows programs that already deliver results, and names new priorities where state action can help businesses grow and create quality jobs in every region.

Economic Security for All (EcSA)

Washington businesses need skilled workers, and many Washingtonians need a way into a good job. Economic Security for All (EcSA), run by local workforce boards, connects the two, covering the training, credentials, and essential support that gets people into quality jobs. EcSA primarily serves low-income Washingtonians, prioritizing traditionally underserved communities, including BIPOC, justice-impacted, and rural populations, and helping them move out of poverty and into self-sufficiency.

EcSA already meets H.R. 1's new federal work requirements. It is a proven and codified program the state can build on as those requirements take effect.

EcSA received $13.338 million last biennium via a mix of state and federal discretionary funds. The current budget holds it at $12.33 million in maintenance-level funding. With another state budget shortfall ahead, *cutting EcSA now would cost the state more in the long run.*

WWA ASKS

- Protect maintenance-level funding for EcSA, adjusted for caseloads and inflation.
- Avoid one-time funding fixes that leave the program short down the road.
- Keep the annual $3 million WIOA investment in EcSA, so help reaches people fast as demand grows.

What EcSA Delivers

July 2023–June 2026

9,008 job seekers served statewide

$34,296 saved by taxpayers each year for every person who reaches self-sufficiency

65% BIPOC population participation

10% of participants were unhoused

MEDIAN WAGE

At enrollment **under $10K**

At completion **$46K–$48K**



RETURN ON INVESTMENT · JULY 2025–JUNE 2026

$1 → $3.26

Every $1 the state puts into EcSA comes back as $3.26 in benefit savings alone *each year*.

583
people and their families reached self-sufficiency

$19.2M
a year in state savings on benefits no longer needed

$10,094
average cost per person, expected to save the state $34,296 each over the next year

Based on a $5.8 million investment.



ECSA IN ACTION · NORTH CENTRAL WASHINGTON

From CNA to RN, and $26,000 more a year

North Central Washington needs nurses. Sonia Casillas Villasenor started as a Certified Nursing Assistant at Confluence Health in 2015, taking classes part-time while she waited for a spot in Wenatchee Valley College's nursing program.

Once she got in, EcSA training incentives let her cut back her hours and study full time, which mattered for a mother of five and first-generation college student. When the incentives were cut in half in her second year, she kept going and made the Dean's List every quarter. Today she's a Registered Nurse at Confluence Health, in a role the region has needed filled for years.

+$26K

Why it pays off: Sonia earns about $26,000 more a year. Her family is less likely to need public assistance, and she's adding to the tax base instead.

EcSA Makes Other Programs Work Better

When people are enrolled in both EcSA and federal WIOA programs:

28% higher wages

2x unhoused people served

Share who enter training

EcSA + WIOA	50%+
WIOA alone	13%

The U.S. Department of Labor has recognized EcSA as a best practice.

Community Reinvestment Program

In 2026, the Legislature passed House Bill 2523, making the Community Reinvestment Program (CRP) permanent and adding stronger oversight and conflict-of-interest safeguards. Working with local Workforce Development Boards, CRP takes a community-driven approach to helping people build skills for steady work and long-term stability.

On July 1, 2027, CRP moves from the Department of Commerce to co-leadership with the Office of Equity, under a transition plan and governance framework designed by a new CRP Work Group. CRP is funded at $50 million for the 2027–29 biennium. Of that, $14.475 million flows through Washington's workforce system, where it works hand in hand with EcSA.

WWA ASKS

- Support CRP's move from the Department of Commerce to co-leadership with the Office of Equity, strengthening community-driven investment, accountability, and equitable program delivery.
- Keep CRP's $50 million in funding and its partnership with Local Workforce Development Boards, so people can cover basic needs during training, small businesses get grants and hiring help, and families build assets through financial coaching and matched savings.

CRP in Action

SNOHOMISH COUNTY

Michael used CRP Career Accelerator incentives and a matched savings account to persist in training and earn an Electrical Assembly certificate at Edmonds College. Today he's a Starlink Aviation Integration Technician at SpaceX.

TRI-CITIES

The Tri-City Hispanic Chamber of Commerce's CRP-funded Emprende course graduated a full class of new and growing business owners in Benton and Franklin counties, across six trades from landscaping and baking to printing and childcare.

What the Investment Bought

CRP results, December 2023–June 2026

Career Accelerator Incentives

$22.6M paid to participants → **3,900+** people supported across Washington

Business Support

$6.7M+ invested directly in local businesses → **800+** employers funded directly

14,000+ businesses reached statewide with grants, technical assistance, and training

Financial Coaching & Matched Savings

$6.5M+ saved by 700+ participants who completed financial coaching → **159** assets purchased in the past year

Vehicles, education, homes, and businesses, including **13 homeownership assets** (2 home purchases, 6 mortgage paydowns, 5 remodels) and **14 businesses** started or scaled

+51% more job seekers served from Black, Latine, Tribal, Asian, Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander communities since CRP began



H.R. 1 Work Requirements & Access to Essential Benefits

On January 1, 2027, new federal work requirements for SNAP and Medicaid take effect. Washingtonians working toward self-sufficiency shouldn't lose essential benefits along the way.

Local workforce boards run EcSA and WIOA Title I and partner on Basic Food Employment & Training. These programs help people meet the requirements and fill jobs employers need. But they're all underfunded for what's coming.

WWA ASKS

- Invest in workforce programs that help people meet the new federal work requirements while gaining skills and jobs.
- Expand coordination among DSHS, ESD, and Local Workforce Development Boards so people can get into approved training without gaps.
- Strengthen regional capacity for jobs, training, and wrap-around supports, and align existing workforce programs with federal work requirements.

WASHINGTONIANS AFFECTED

~106,000

face new SNAP work requirements

~200,000

face new Medicaid work requirements

Source: state agency estimates.

✓ **EcSA already meets these requirements**

PROGRAMS THAT HELP PEOPLE COMPLY

- EcSA
- WIOA Title I
- Basic Food Employment & Training

Postsecondary Education & Workforce Training

Too many Washingtonians from low-income and historically marginalized communities still can't get to college or training. The Washington College Grant is one of the most generous aid programs in the country, yet thousands of eligible students never use it. Many students graduate without filling out the FAFSA or WASFA. Colleges spend time on complex regulatory processes that could go to teaching. And current aid rarely covers short-term training that gets people into jobs fast.

WWA ASKS

01

FAFSA & WASFA completion

Support investments that make completing the FAFSA or WASFA a graduation requirement, with clear exceptions and opt-outs that protect students.

02

Automatic grant eligibility

Make every Washingtonian whose household qualifies for SNAP automatically eligible for the Washington College Grant.

03

Short-term training

Let Washington College Grant dollars pay for quality short-term and non-credit programs that match regional job demand and lead to credentials fast.

A $1 Raise Costs More Than It Pays

A SINGLE PARENT WITH ONE CHILD:

$20 AN HOUR

$41,600 a year

At or under 200% of the Federal Poverty Level

Eligible for all 7

- [x] SNAP/Food assistance
- [x] Working Connections Child Care
- [x] Apple Health/Qualified Health Plans
- [x] Housing assistance
- [x] Utility assistance
- [x] Telephone assistance
- [x] Educational assistance (Pell, Opportunity Grants, SNG, BFET, etc.)

+$1 → an hour

$21 AN HOUR

$43,680 a year

Over 200% of the Federal Poverty Level ($43,280)

Eligible for 0

- [ ] ~~SNAP/Food assistance~~
- [ ] ~~Working Connections Child Care~~
- [ ] ~~Apple Health/Qualified Health Plans~~
- [ ] ~~Housing assistance~~
- [ ] ~~Utility assistance~~
- [ ] ~~Telephone assistance~~
- [ ] ~~Educational assistance (Pell, Opportunity Grants, SNG, BFET, etc.)~~

Illustrative example based on 2026 federal poverty guidelines. Eligibility rules vary by program.

Benefits Cliffs

A benefits cliff hits when a small raise pushes income just past a program's limit, and public assistance, child care, or housing support disappears. It often happens right as a family is about to stand on its own.

Employers feel it too. When people can't afford child care or housing, they leave jobs, turn down promotions, and skip more training.

Wrap-around services coordinated by local Workforce Development Boards help families keep moving up while easing the loss.

WWA ASKS

- Protect and expand incentives for flexible funds that help people overcome barriers to reach career goals and earn more while relying less on public assistance.
- Support housing policies for workers who earn too much to qualify for low-income housing but can't afford to live near their jobs.
- Invest in affordable child care for infants and school-age children, and in the people who do this vital work at child care centers across our state.

Job Expansion & Creation

Employers say rising costs, more regulation, and ongoing talent shortages make it harder to grow. Legislators are building a statewide Jobs Package to answer that. Local workforce boards are ready to deliver it: we already work side by side with employers, colleges, and economic development councils to match job seekers with the skills industry needs.



30%+
AI use in Puget Sound counties

<10%
AI use in many rural areas

92%
of jobs require digital skills

1 in 3
workers have low or no digital skills

Sources: Microsoft analysis (AI use); National Skills Coalition (digital skills)

WWA ASKS

01 A Jobs Package that works locally

- Advance a statewide Jobs Package that strengthens Washington's training network through employer partnerships, career-connected learning, fast reskilling, and investment in growing industries.
- Run it through locally led workforce development, so dollars reach the employers and job seekers in every region.
- Include the Washingtonians facing new SNAP and Medicaid work requirements. Put them on the path to jobs employers are trying to fill.

02 One table for employers

- Let colleges and high school CTE programs pool their industry advisory work into regional industry roundtables, facilitated by local workforce boards across the state's 12 workforce areas.
- Employers get one table instead of six, less duplication, and a direct say in training. Students earn credentials employers value.

03 Fewer barriers to hiring and growth

- Reduce regulatory burden on apprentices and the employers who train them.
- Ease the burden of Paid Family and Medical Leave on small employers.
- Speed up permitting and credentialing, so jobs and workers get to work sooner.

04 AI readiness

- Support a statewide AI readiness plan that brings together schools, colleges, workforce programs, employers, and job seekers.
- Track where AI is changing jobs by industry and region, and fund training that helps workers move into new roles.

05 Digital skills for every region

- Pair broadband build-out with training for the people who build it.
- Open more paths into high-demand, high-wage tech careers through digital literacy, AI learning, and targeted support, especially in rural and underserved communities.