



Sen. Mike Padden  
P.O. Box 40404  
Olympia, WA 98504-0404

LD4

2023 LEGISLATIVE REVIEW • 4<sup>TH</sup> LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT

NEW DRUG-POSSESSION LAW DOES NOT GO FAR ENOUGH TO ADDRESS DRUG CRISIS

During a one-day special session on May 16, the Legislature approved a drug-possession bill to replace the current law, which expires July 1. However, I was among the “no” votes in the Senate.

The new law created by **Senate Bill 5536** is an improvement over the terrible law passed in 2021 that lowered the criminal penalty for illegally possessing hard drugs from a felony to a misdemeanor. (That 2021 law followed the state Supreme Court’s Blake ruling, which declared Washington’s felony drug-possession statute was unconstitutional.) However, the ‘Blake fix’ will not solve our state’s growing problem with hard drugs. (Washington ranks second nationally in the percentage increase in drug overdose deaths since 2020.)

For drug offenders to seek treatment and stay with it, we need to make it a felony again to possess the most dangerous drugs like fentanyl, meth and heroin. The threat of a felony conviction is more necessary to persuade a drug offender to undergo treatment than the hybrid crime allowed in the new law.

Under the new law, which takes effect July 1, people convicted for the first or second time for drug possession or public use would face a penalty of up to 180 days in jail and a fine up to \$1,000. For a third or subsequent conviction, they would face up to 364 days in jail. The punishment under this new law is basically a hybrid between a gross

misdemeanor and a misdemeanor. It will not be an effective deterrent for drug offenders. The new law ignores an offender’s criminal history when it comes to sentencing. The offender’s full criminal history should be taken into account.



Standard  
U.S. Postage  
**PAID**  
Spokane WA  
Permit #324

4<sup>TH</sup> LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT • SPOKANE VALLEY, LIBERTY LAKE AND NE SPOKANE COUNTY



Sen. Mike Padden  
R-Spokane Valley

**OLYMPIA OFFICE:**  
215 Legislative Modular Building  
Olympia, WA 98504-0404  
360-786-7606

**DISTRICT OFFICE:**  
509-921-2460

Mike.Padden@leg.wa.gov

**TOLL-FREE LEGISLATIVE HOTLINE:**  
1-800-562-6000

**HEARING-IMPAIRED HOTLINE:**  
1-800-833-6388

**SENATE COMMITTEES:**  
Law & Justice (Ranking Republican)  
Health & Long Term Care  
Transportation



**Dear Friends and Neighbors,**

The 2023 105-day legislative session ended on April 23. Legislators participated on May 16 for a one-day special session. The Legislature approved a new drug-possession measure after lawmakers did not pass such a proposal during regular session.

This year’s session included a mix of positive moments and negative moments. On the positive side, the Legislature unanimously passed a new two-year state capital budget with strong bipartisan input. It returned taxpayer dollars by funding several projects in the 4th Legislative District. The new state transportation budget includes continued funding for ongoing North-South Freeway construction. We did not follow the governor’s recommendation to delay that project.

Four of the bills I prime-sponsored this year were approved by the Legislature and recently signed by the governor.

On the negative side, Democratic majorities in the Senate and House passed several bills that are bad for one reason or another. They include SB 5599, a transgender youth measure that restricts parental rights, and SB 5082, which eliminates statewide advisory votes from appearing on ballots. The new state operating budget crafted by Democrats also has problems that forced me to oppose it. Among other things, it lacked needed property-tax relief.

This newsletter takes a look at the operating and capital budgets. It also reviews some key bills passed by the Legislature, as well as the bills prime-sponsored by myself that were signed by the governor.

If you have questions or comments about the recently ended session, or ideas for legislation that should be considered in 2024, please let me know. My office contact information is found on this page.

Thank you for the honor and privilege to serve as your 4th District state senator.

  
Sen. Mike Padden



- WHAT’S INSIDE:**
- New capital budget funds many 4th District projects
  - Problems with new state operating budget
  - Four Padden bills signed by the governor
  - Democratic legislators, governor approve restrictive gun bills
  - Flawed vehicle-pursuit bill signed into law
  - New 4th District government guides available
  - New drug-possession law does not go far enough to address drug crisis





# 2023 LEGISLATIVE REVIEW • 4<sup>TH</sup> LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT

## NEW CAPITAL BUDGET FUNDS MANY 4<sup>TH</sup> DISTRICT PROJECTS

The two-year state capital budget unanimously passed by the Legislature funds many projects in the 4th Legislative District, allowing district residents to see their tax dollars at work in their local communities. They include:

- \$1.176 million for Spokane Valley Performing Arts Center construction, with another \$1.849 million provided for the Spokane Valley Summer Theatre, which will be part of the performing arts center.
- \$1.03 million for the HUB sports fields in Liberty Lake.
- \$750,000 for Spokane Scale House Market in Spokane Valley.
- \$543,000 for Avista Stadium improvements in Spokane Valley.
- \$500,000 in Washington Wildlife Recreation Program funding for phase 2 work at Greenacres Park in Spokane Valley.
- \$350,000 for a synthetic turf field in Liberty Lake.
- \$207,000 for Veterans Memorial Balfour Park in Spokane Valley, with this funding having been repurposed from the 2022 state capital budget.
- \$130,000 for natural areas facilities preservation and access.
- \$100,000 for Mount Spokane Ski and Snowboard Park in Mead.
- \$100,000 for the Spokane Valley Heritage Museum.
- \$100,000 from the Building Communities Fund Grant Program for expansion of the public food business incubator.
- \$90,000 for the Honor Flight Museum to be located in Newman Lake.
- \$40,000 to fund appraisals of two pieces of property: one in Liberty Lake that is being considered as the possible new location for the Army National Guard unit, and the other at Geiger Field, where the unit is located.

I was pleased that the Senate version of the capital budget was adopted by the Legislature.

The capital budget funds the construction and maintenance of state buildings, public-school matching grants, higher-education facilities, public lands, parks, and other assets.



## PROBLEMS WITH NEW STATE OPERATING BUDGET

On the last day of the regular session, the Legislature passed a new, two-year \$69 billion state operating budget. There were three main reasons why I voted against this spending plan.

First, the operating budget provides a whopping \$15.5 million over the next two years to pay for and promote abortions. This includes funding for “outreach, patient navigation, and staffing” at the Department of Health to implement the governor’s program to bring women to Washington from states that protect the unborn. During the session, the governor also announced his administration had spent millions of dollars, without legislative authorization, to stockpile chemical-abortion pills that may end up being discarded. It is very wrong to use taxpayer dollars to make Washington an “abortion destination state.”

Second, this budget includes \$2 million in funding for yet another unnecessary study involving the four lower Snake River dams. Spending state money on this is a waste of taxpayer dollars because those dams belong to the federal government, and their future is a federal decision. Like other eastern Washington legislators and eastern Washington’s congressional delegation, I oppose the idea of breaching the four Snake River dams. Breaching the dams is bad for agriculture, transportation and our eastern Washington economy.

Third, the new operating budget does not provide widespread tax relief, especially property-tax relief. Many Washingtonians are being taxed out of their homes, and property-tax relief – which the state can well afford – would help many homeowners. While many other states, such as California and Idaho, have provided tax relief for their citizens in recent years, our Democrat governor and Democrat-run Legislature in Washington still refuse to do the same for our hard-working taxpayers.

On the positive side, the new operating budget does not raise taxes or increase state spending by double-digits, which is a welcome change from state spending plans in recent years.

# 2023 LEGISLATIVE REVIEW • 4<sup>TH</sup> LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT

## FOUR PADDEN BILLS SIGNED BY THE GOVERNOR

During the session, the Legislature passed four bills that I prime-sponsored this year. All recently were signed by Gov. Inslee.

- **Senate Bill 5033** imposes longer sentences on sexually abusive jail and prison guards. I introduced the bill after KING-TV in Seattle did stories on a prison guard in Clallam County who sexually abused several female inmates.
- **Senate Bill 5058** helps encourage home ownership in our state by making it easier for smaller condominium buildings to be constructed. It specifically will exempt buildings with 12 or fewer units that are no more than two stories from the definition of multiunit residential building.
- **Senate Bill 5096** aids businesses looking to follow a business model allowing workers to be owners.
- **Senate Bill 5218** makes the sale of motorized wheelchairs and other mobility-improving equipment tax-exempt. Removing the sales tax from motorized wheelchairs or other technological equipment will help those needing them to save money while also helping maintain their independence.



## DEMOCRATIC LEGISLATORS, GOVERNOR APPROVE RESTRICTIVE GUN BILLS

The rights of law-abiding citizens to purchase and use firearms in our state took a step backward after two bills were passed by majority Democrats and signed by Gov. Inslee.

**House Bill 1240** bans the sale of about 60 semi-automatic firearms in Washington. Under this measure, exceptions are included for those who now own or someday inherit such a firearm. Violating this new law is a gross misdemeanor, punishable by up to 364 days in jail and a fine of up to \$5,000. **House Bill 1143** prohibits someone from buying a firearm from a dealer unless the buyer has passed a background check and has completed a firearm-safety program. I opposed both proposals because they restrict our rights under both the U.S. and Washington constitutions.

HB 1240 was written in a way that put the ban into effect immediately after the governor signed it, meaning that people cannot challenge it through a referendum. However, lawsuits already have been filed against HB 1240. It is possible this law will be put before the U.S. Supreme Court, which in all probability will strike it down as unconstitutional.

## NEW 4<sup>TH</sup> DISTRICT GOVERNMENT GUIDES AVAILABLE

My office recently produced and mailed an updated version of a 4th District government guide to many households in our district. If you did not receive a government guide and would like one, you can contact my district office at 509-921-2460. You also can pick up a free copy of the government guide at any of these locations:

- Millwood City Hall • 9103 E Frederick Ave., Spokane, WA 99206
- Argonne Library • 4322 N Argonne Road, Spokane, WA 99212
- Spokane Valley City Hall • 10210 E Sprague Ave., Spokane Valley, WA 99206
- Spokane Valley Library • 12004 E Main Ave., Spokane Valley, WA 99206
- Liberty Lake City Hall • 22710 E Country Vista Drive, Liberty Lake, WA 99019
- Liberty Lake Library • 23123 E Mission Ave., Liberty Lake, WA 99019
- Otis Orchards Library • 22324 E Wellesley Ave., Otis Orchards, WA 99027
- Spokane Valley Senior Center • 2426 N Discovery Place, Spokane Valley, WA 99216



## FLAWED VEHICLE-PURSUIT BILL SIGNED INTO LAW

In 2021, the Democrat-controlled Legislature severely weakened Washington’s vehicle-pursuit law by allowing law-enforcement officers to pursue a suspect only if they have probable cause to believe the driver has committed a violent or sexual crime, or escaped from jail. That law also allows pursuits for reasonable suspicion of DUI, but it bans pursuits for auto thefts and burglaries.

Since the pursuit restrictions went into effect, auto thefts in Washington have risen 31% from 2021 to 2022, the second-largest increase after Illinois. The total number of vehicle thefts in our state last year hit 46,939, ranking Washington third after only California and Texas, the two most populous states in the America. (Washington ranks 13th in population.)

This year, a bill that partially restores the ability of officers to engage in vehicle pursuits recently was signed by the governor. **Senate Bill 5352** lowers the threshold for law enforcement to chase suspects from probable cause to reasonable suspicion of six violent and sex crimes. Pursuits for domestic violence and vehicular assaults also are allowed.

I voted against this bill because officers still cannot chase after people suspected of auto theft or reckless driving. Washington is second highest in the U.S. for auto thefts. Because SB 5352 still restricts officers from pursuing auto-theft suspects, this crime will continue to be a huge problem here in Washington.