



May 6, 2020

Dear Washington State Legislators,

Thank you for your outstanding work during the 2020 regular session in support of affordable housing, homelessness, and related services for those in need. It is heartbreaking that the COVID-19 crisis came so quickly on the heels of that good work. As you prepare for what will likely be one of the most challenging special sessions ever, the League of Women Voters of Washington requests that you seek to create opportunities amid the destruction of the COVID-19 crisis. Specifically, we ask that you prioritize ways to reverse the racial disparities that this crisis has so glaringly highlighted, even as you must consider budget cuts.

There is much research demonstrating the racial inequities that have existed for decades in employment, income, wealth, health care, health outcomes, housing/homelessness, and other areas. The COVID-19 pandemic has not only shone a bright light on these existing disparities but has made—and will continue to make—them worse if systemic changes are not made. We ask that as you decide what budget cuts to make, you look closely at the impacts of your proposed reductions on people living at the lowest income levels, with particular emphasis on people of color.

Please consider several specific items:

- **Pass the capital gains tax.** This has been contemplated over several recent legislative sessions and could be passed now. This would restructure the tax system, reduce the disproportionate reliance on sales tax, and help the state's finances as well as improve the current inequity in our tax structure.
- **Maintain the budget for affordable housing development.** Housing is necessary for good health, gainful employment, and success in school. During this economic collapse, people of color will lose their jobs, and therefore their housing, at much higher rates than others. The cost of addressing the consequences will be higher than the cost of providing housing.
- **Prepare now for the coming surge in homelessness.** Homelessness will increase as the eviction and foreclosure moratoria end. People who have lost their jobs will be unable to make the necessary back payments when they come due. While the federal relief bills have provided some temporary income support, for many it is not enough to avoid homelessness. And, disproportionately, those who become homeless will be people of color, just as with the current population experiencing homelessness.

One option might be to call upon the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to construct temporary shelters for people experiencing homelessness to preserve some dignity and to limit any increase in the cost of services for street, vehicle, and camp living.

- **Retain, or even expand, the Medicaid program at current levels.** As the unemployment rate increases, many more people will need to look to Medicaid for health care.
- **Plan for the future by establishing work groups** to define pathways to a variety of measures that would create longer-lasting system corrections: health care for all, greater equity in education and criminal justice, and expansion of necessary infrastructure (such as broadband internet access for rural communities and those currently unable to afford Wi-Fi service); and establish policies that recognize the need for climate mitigation and adaptation, and assure climate justice. While funding is limited at the moment, now is the time to plan for when the economy improves.

We recognize and appreciate the job you have ahead of you, and the League stands ready to support you in any way it can. Thank you for considering our perspective as you proceed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lunell Haught". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Lunell Haught, President