

Columbia Legal Services is a statewide legal impact advocacy organization that works to dismantle and transform the systems that perpetuate poverty and injustice. Our work is informed by the communities we serve across Washington state – those who are most impacted by the broken immigration system and mass incarceration. We believe that to achieve justice, all communities should have a voice in the creation and implementation of the policies, laws, and legal systems that impact them. In 2020, we are asking state policymakers to:

Promote economic self-sufficiency and keep people housed.

A driver's license is a necessary tool to allow people to drive to work. Washington should end the practice of suspending driver's licenses due to an inability to pay a traffic fine. (SB 6153)

Consumers should be protected in court from unsubstantiated debt buyer lawsuits, by requiring basic proof of the alleged debt. (HB 2476)

Tenants should not be blocked from housing due to unsupported and excessive claims for damage to their previous rental unit. Washington should require itemized documentation of repair costs and more clearly define "wear and tear" to prevent excessive claims for routine maintenance. (HB 2520)

Respect the safety and dignity of workers.

Washington should provide a remedy for low-wage workers who have been victims of wage theft. The Wage Recovery Act would allow workers who have been victimized by wage theft to put a hold (a lien) on their employer's assets. (HB 1514/SB 6053)

Immigrant farm workers in the United States on an H-2A visa face various forms of retaliation, including being put on lists of workers banned from returning to the U.S. because they tried to improve wages or working conditions on the farms where they worked. Washington should update its Farm Labor Contractor Act to end these practices. (SB 6261)

Stop juvenile records from shaping the future of young people.

Washington should improve its juvenile record sealing laws so that mistakes of youth don't burden a person throughout their lifetime. (SB 6444)(SB 5182/HB 2794)

End the use of private for-profit detention in the state.

For-profit private prisons and detention centers lack transparency and oversight, which leads to inadequate medical care and poor nutrition, overuse of solitary confinement, and barriers to access for legal counsel and other community support systems. Washington should better serve people in confinement by ending the use of private for-profit detention in the state. (HB 2576/SB 6442)

Support Agenda

Columbia Legal Services supports legislation proposed by community partners and allies that helps to advance social, economic, and racial equity for people living in poverty. These proposals include:

- Increasing eligibility for children's health insurance program to age 26, regardless of immigration status.
- Preventing landlords from unfairly rejecting potential tenants due to their criminal history.
- Requiring landlords to provide a legitimate business reason to terminate a tenancy and extending notice requirements to displaced tenants. (HB 1656)
- Improving access to justice by prohibiting immigration enforcement at our state courthouses.
- Allowing parents returning to their communities after incarceration to volunteer in their children's schools. (HB 2220)
- Addressing outdated criminal penalties that stigmatize HIV+ Washingtonians to better reflect modern understanding of the transmission of infectious diseases. (HB 1551)
- Giving mobile home park residents the opportunity to purchase the land they live on when park owners choose to sell.
- Clarifying that private detention centers are not essential public facilities under the Growth Management Act. (SB 5117)
- Restoring the right to vote of people released from prison but still under community supervision.
- Creating an automatic process for vacating felony and misdemeanor records through regular administrative hearings.