

## 2015 Legislative Priorities

### OUR MISSION

**The Washington Public Interest Research Group (WashPIRG) is an advocate for the public interest.** *When consumers are cheated or the voices of ordinary citizens are drowned out by special interest lobbyists, WashPIRG speaks up and takes action. We uncover threats to public health and well-being and fight to end them, using the time-tested tools of investigative research, media exposés, grassroots organizing, advocacy and litigation. WashPIRG's mission is to deliver persistent, result-oriented public interest activism that protects consumers, encourages a fair, sustainable economy, and fosters responsive, democratic government.*

### Privacy: Strengthen Data Breach Notices

In the new Big Data world, where firms are racing to vacuum up even more data than ever before, with even less acknowledgement of any privacy interest by consumers (or citizens), it is important that we re-establish norms that give consumers and citizens greater control over the collection, and use, of their personal information.

- **WashPIRG supports HB 1078**, enhancing the protection of consumer financial information from data breaches. Data collectors collect and save too much information on consumers, keep it too long and often use it without consumer knowledge, let alone permission. HB 1078 would better protect consumers from the failure of data collectors – including retailers, banks, universities, government agencies, health insurers and others – to protect customer information from misuse. Data breaches, hacks and misuse cost the economy billions of dollars and cause profound harms to consumers. While we support HB 1078, we urge state leaders to strengthen this bill by striking this language from the bill: “Notice is not required if the breach of the security of the system is not reasonably likely to subject consumers to a risk of harm.” Consumers should always be notified of breaches, as this notification will encourage best practices among data collectors to prevent data breaches.

### 21<sup>st</sup> Century Transportation

Washington's transportation spending priorities are backwards. Despite mounting transportation financing problems and increasing repair needs, the state continues to spend billions of taxpayer dollars on new highways and unneeded expansions. Meanwhile, roads and bridges are crumbling, and

many public transit systems are underfunded. We should invest transportation resources in repairing existing infrastructure and in alternatives that enhance mobility for all.

- **WashPIRG supports ensuring capital funding goes to fix our crumbling roads and bridges first, before building more.**
- WashPIRG supports improving the planning process so that transportation dollars are spent wisely.
- With Washington residents driving less and mounting evidence that transportation preferences are changing, WashPIRG supports increased investment in transportation infrastructure that creates more transportation choices, improves air quality, and empowers people to travel by bus, rail, and bike and on foot, all of which will enhance future mobility.

### **Consumer Protection: Don't Weaken Payday Protections**

Consumers should be protected from unsafe, shoddy or over-priced products. Ideally, market forces should ensure that products are priced fairly, that consumers have adequate choices and that consumer health and safety is guaranteed when they buy goods and services. When market forces fail to achieve these outcomes, consumer protections are needed.

- **WashPIRG opposes SB 5899** and any effort to weaken standards on predatory payday and installment loan products. SB 5899 would allow payday lenders to create a new high cost lending product in our state. SB 5899 replaces current payday lending statute with a new installment product. Unfortunately, this product is not better for Washington consumers than the current system. Because of the strong payday lending reforms passed in 2009, Washington has some of the best consumer results in states where high-cost short term lending is allowed. SB5899 would weaken these reforms and thereby weaken consumer protections.

### **Public Health & Toxics: Protecting Kids from Chemicals**

Our families are exposed to toxic chemicals that are linked to cancer, asthma, learning disabilities, reproductive problems, and other diseases in everyday consumer products. Toys and furniture shouldn't contain toxic chemicals that are linked to serious health effects. Our Public Health Program advocates for protections and rules that make sure our food, drugs, medical devices and other products are safe to use.

- **WashPIRG supports HB 1174**, the Toxic-Free Kids and Families Act. Our children deserve a safe and healthy world. The Toxic-Free Kids and Families Act phases out toxic flame retardants in children's products and home furniture securing a healthier future for our kids, firefighters, and families.

### **Democracy: Amendment to Overturn Citizens United**

The Supreme Court's 2010 Citizens United ruling opened the floodgates for unlimited special interest money in our elections, drowning out the voices of average Americans and leading to a loss of public faith in our democracy. Large contributions from a few special interests and mega-donors unduly influence who runs for office, what issues get debated, and too often who wins on election night. WashPIRG research found that in 2012, 32 donors gave more money than all 3.7 million of President Obama and Governor Romney's small donors combined. We need to level the playing field to reestablish a democracy of, by and for the People.

- **WashPIRG urges you to sign onto the “Letter to Washington State Congressional Delegation Requesting Constitutional Amendment to Overturn *Citizens United v. FEC*.”**  
Democracy has at its heart a basic promise: each citizen has an equal voice in selecting who represents them. Our Republic is built, in Lincoln’s words, on the commitment that ours is a “government of, by and for the people.” The *Citizens United* decision poses a direct and dramatic threat to that promise and to that commitment. This letter urges Washington’s U.S. Senators and Representatives to send a constitutional amendment to the states reversing the United States Supreme Court’s ruling in *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*.

### **Public Health: Stop the Overuse of Antibiotics**

At least 23,000 Americans die every year from antibiotic-resistant bacteria. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention warns that the widespread overuse of antibiotics on factory farms is making them less effective and is serious threat to public health.

- **WashPIRG supports policies that stop the overuse of antibiotics on factory farms** that raise chicken or beef by banning the use of antibiotics on healthy animals.

### **Tax and Budget: Transparent and Accountable Government**

Washington faces tough budget decisions this year. Washington residents have the right to know how public money is being spent, and that no company should be able to game the tax system to avoid paying what it legitimately owes. Unfortunately, multi-state corporations are able to use accounting tricks to avoid paying what they owe, leaving individuals and small businesses to bear the brunt of the tax burden.

- **WashPIRG supports transparency and accountability in public spending.**
- **WashPIRG opposes corporate tax-avoidance schemes.**