

2016 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.*

Democracy: Voting Reforms to Increase Participation

Our democracy functions best when all eligible voters participate in the political process, and when the voting system is free, fair, and accessible. After all, voting is the cornerstone of our democracy. Reforms that increase participation will strengthen our democracy and ensure that more people are heard and represented.

- **WashPIRG supports HB 2682/SB 6379**, which would automatically register eligible citizens who have an enhanced driver's license, commercial driver's license, or apply for benefits for certain programs through the Department of Social and Health Services or the state Health Benefits Exchange.
- **WashPIRG supports HB 2707/SB 6340**, which would extend voter pre-registration opportunities to 17 year-olds in high schools, online, in-person, and at the Department of Licensing.
- **WashPIRG supports HB 1144**, which would extend the time period by which you must register to vote from 29 days before an election to 8 days before an election and allows same day voter registration.
- **WashPIRG supports HB 1428/SB 5527**, which would expand voter registration opportunities by moving the mail-in, online, and in-person registration deadline to 11 days prior to Election Day (from 29 days online), therefore increasing registration and turnout rates.
- **WashPIRG support HB1294/SB 5140**, which would allow 16- and 17-year-olds to pre-register to vote at the Department of Licensing when they take their driver's test. They would then receive their ballot when they are 18 and eligible to vote.

Public Health: 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 2545/SB 6440**, 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.

Consumer Protection: Stopping Predatory Lending and Practices

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 5222**, which would allow debt collection agencies to charge consumers a 50 cent surcharge plus 3% of the payment amount fee for use of a credit card.
- **WashPIRG opposes any effort to weaken consumer protections on predatory payday and installment loan products.** Washington State enacted payday lending reforms to protect consumers in 2009. If anything, these protections should be strengthened, not weakened.

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. Washington residents have the right to know how public money is being spent, and 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.**