

## Weekly Legislative Update: Criminal Justice

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### Overview

We are now a little more than halfway through the legislative session, with the next big deadline coming up on **Tuesday, February 13**. Bills need to pass out of the house of origin by 5:00 PM that day. Then it's onto the opposite house with a very short timeline for moving bills.

### Bills Needing Action This Week

*Remember, only authorized members can speak for the League; the Issue Chairs will do that, so **please leave the "Organization" box blank**. A more powerful influence is many voices speaking for themselves rather than many voices speaking for the League.*

#### POLICE ACCOUNTABILITY

We prioritized three police accountability bills this session—**HB 1445 Attorney General Investigations and Reform**, **HB 1513 Improving Traffic Safety**, and **HB 1579 Independent Prosecutor**. It looks like HB 1445 will not be moving forward, and the same is probably true of HB 1513. However, HB 1579, the independent prosecutor bill, has already passed the House (53-44) and is set for hearing in the Senate Law & Justice Committee on Thursday, February 15.

 **Sign in PRO on HB 1579 [here](#) by February 15 at 7:00 AM.**

#### TAKE ACTION ON SENTENCING REFORM

A couple of sentencing reform bills are awaiting a vote on the House floor—**HB 2065 Juvenile Points** and **HB 1798 Earned Release Time for Good Behavior**, as is **HB 1994 Authorizing Judges to Dismiss Misdemeanor Charges**.

 **Ask your Representatives to VOTE YES on HB 2065 [here](#).**

 **Ask your Representatives to VOTE YES on HB 1798 [here](#).**

#### Background for HB 2065:

In 2023, the legislature prospectively eliminated the automatic use of juvenile points in sentencing people for crimes committed as adults. However, by making the bill only apply prospectively and not retroactively, the bill's impact was substantially minimized, leaving over 800 people incarcerated on enhanced sentences that no longer exist. The removal of retroactivity

was particularly devastating for communities of color who are the most disproportionately impacted by juvenile points. 41% of Native American People, 39% of Black People, 38% of Pacific Islanders, and 32% of Latinx people currently incarcerated have one or more juvenile felony adjudications on their criminal history.

#### **Talking Points:**

- HB 2065 will fix the inherent unfairness of requiring people to serve vastly different sentences for the same offense.
- The bill will not result in automatic release for people with juvenile points. Instead, a judge will be allowed to exercise discretion in considering an adult's juvenile record during resentencing in moving up or down the new sentencing range.
- We know that children are different from adults. We know that the human brain is not fully developed until the age of 25 – which results in children and young adults being more impulsive, more susceptible to peer pressure, and less capable of weighing the consequences of their actions.
- Continuing to automatically increase a person's punishment because of an offense they committed as a youth serves neither that individual nor public safety and raises the overall cost of corrections by effectively punishing people twice for the same offense.

#### **Background for HB 1798:**

Under current law, there are varying amounts of time that can be deducted from a person's sentence for good behavior. Some people get as little as 10% off. This bill would return to the policy in effect before the "tough on crime" sentencing legislation took effect and provide a standard 33 1/3% off for everyone.

#### **Talking Points:**

- HB 1798 would improve public safety by incentivizing positive programming, thus improving the rehabilitation of those released from prison. Well beyond reducing recidivism, their release would increase the number of passionate youth mentors and intervention specialists in the community, further improving public safety.
- Inside the prison, an environment focused on rehabilitation and positive behavior would improve safety for everyone in prison - staff and incarcerated people, alike. This improved environment might improve the current understaffing crisis.

- Restoring earned time to its original level will save our state many millions of dollars annually. DOC estimates savings of \$5.1 million in 2025, with the annual savings rising to \$5.6 million by 2030.
- HB 1798 would bring Washington's earned time system up to the low end of the national average. Currently, our state's earned time system ranks 49th in the country.

## Bills Not Moving Forward

Unfortunately, the rest of our priority bills are not moving forward this year, including [HB 1087 Ending Long-Term Solitary Confinement](#), [HB 1325 Allowing Review of Long Sentences](#), [HB 2030 Allowing Voting in Prison](#), [HB 2178 Establishing a Pathway Off Lifetime Community Custody for People with Sex Offense Convictions](#), [HB 6021 Authorizing Free Phone Calls for People in Prison](#), and [HB 6189 Improving Jail Oversight](#). During the interim, we'll be working with coalitions and connecting with bill sponsors to chart a path forward for 2025!

## How You Can Be Involved

- If you are interested in a particular bill, use the links above to go to the webpage for that bill. These pages include staff summaries and reports including who testified PRO, CON, or OTHER on the bill, if there has been a public hearing. There is also information about how to access videos of hearings that have been held.
- Read and take action through the [LWVWA Legislative Action Newsletter](#), distributed each Sunday during the legislative session.
- You may also express your opinion on legislation with the LWVWA issue chairs. We will take your perspectives under consideration as we determine our support for legislation and prepare testimony. Please direct questions or comments to [Heather Kelly](#), Criminal Justice Issue Chair.
- Join the LWVWA Criminal Justice Action group by emailing [Heather Kelly](#) or [Deb Carstens](#).