

Legislative Recap



WASHINGTON
**Medical
Commission**
Licensing. Accountability. Leadership.

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This year was different for the Washington Medical Commission (WMC) and the world. As everything else affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, the legislative session in our state covered new territory via online meetings, hearings, testimony and votes. Despite this distanced format, legislators introduced 1,458 bills of which 334 passed.

In general, it was a good year for recognizing the importance of public health and the need to support and build out systems. The Department of Health (DOH) summed up the year this way, "Legislators agreed to make significant advances in public health this session, including major financial investments into Foundational Public Health Services and COVID-19 response. This was an unprecedented success!"

The WMC tracked 25 bills this session that impact the practice of medicine. The WMC connected weekly with our legislative sub-committee (consisting of commissioners, the WMC chair and the Executive Director) about these bills and others the DOH tracked. The sub-committee then weighed-in with their thoughts via a weekly DOH call.

The WMC had several items of interest impacting our work. Three bills stand out from the rest:

- House Bill 1129, concerning the licensure of International Medical Graduates (IMG) passed. This bill authorizes the WMC to issue limited licenses to IMGs and persons accepted for certain public and private institutions. This license lasts for two years and is renewable one time for a total of four years. As WMC is staff for the IMG Implementation Workgroup, we have heard a lot of optimism around this bill. The bill gives us the capacity to provide new opportunities for IMGs, helps address gaps in culturally competent care and creates a path for IMGs to have clinical experience prior to applying for a residency.
- Senate Bill 5423, which clarifies the exemptions in our statute (RCW 18.71.030), also passed. This bill, supported by the WMC, allows peer-to-peer consultation across state lines regarding the diagnosis or treatment of patients. We have often received inquiries in the past asking if an out-of-state physician can consult within Washington State and we have used our telemedicine policy to provide affirmative guidance. This bill gives WMC clear statutory authority to say, "Yes, doctors can consult with another physician on care even if that person is

not licensed in Washington." SB 5423 mirrors laws in 30 other states. This is a win for physicians in our state and the public.

- Senate Bill 5229 adopts new standards for continuing medical education (CME). The bill requires that by January 1, 2024, DOH in consultation with WMC and other boards and commissions, adopt rules for CME programs to address bias, racism, poverty and other elements that manifest as health inequities. These CME are not additional and can count towards the 200 hours per cycle already required.

The legislature added an audit of the WMC licensing and disciplinary processes to the budget. This law requires us to contract with the state auditor's office to analyze licensing times and compare our disciplinary processes with other states. As was the case with other boards and commissions, the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted elements of our processes in need of improvement. The WMC has taken steps to do that and we will see that reflected in the audit outcome. While it is not something we were planning on, we believe this audit will actually demonstrate the great work the WMC does - especially compared to other states.

Several other bills that are of interest to the medical profession, although not directly impactful to the WMC, passed this session. Those bills include topics like opioid overdose reversal medication prescriptions, protecting pregnancy and miscarriage-related patient care, the supervision of medical assistants, and audio-only telemedicine billing. For more insight into the 2021 Legislative Session, and discussion about these bills, please visit our [YouTube channel](#).

Next session, legislators plan to be working back at the Capitol, although there is talk that many procedures put into place during the pandemic may continue. It will be a "short session" of only 60-days and the second half of the biennium cycle so a supplemental budget to fix gaps will be considered. Until then, keep your eyes out for our upcoming articles that are a deeper dive into new legislation that may affect you!