
SUBSTITUTE HOUSE BILL 1147

State of Washington

69th Legislature

2025 Regular Session

By House State Government & Tribal Relations (originally sponsored by Representatives Farivar, Simmons, Ryu, Ramel, Mena, Macri, Doglio, Goodman, Ormsby, and Hill)

READ FIRST TIME 02/04/25.

1 AN ACT Relating to supporting civic engagement for incarcerated
2 and institutionalized individuals in state custody to promote
3 inclusion and rehabilitation; adding a new chapter to Title 72 RCW;
4 and providing an effective date.

5 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

6 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** (1) The legislature recognizes that people
7 with direct lived experience are experts in their own lives and
8 experience. The passage of the nothing about us without us act
9 solidified our commitment to developing smart and inclusive policy
10 with the leadership of directly impacted populations.

11 (2) Those who are incarcerated or experiencing
12 institutionalization face extraordinary barriers to civic
13 participation, are most impacted by lawmaking, and benefit greatly by
14 participating in society. Society also benefits tremendously when the
15 treatment or rehabilitation of directly impacted people is
16 accelerated by their inclusion in the civic process.

17 (3) The legislature recognizes that:

18 (a) Individuals within state institutions remain members of
19 society throughout the duration and beyond the conclusion of their
20 treatment, punishment, or commitment within those institutions;

1 (b) All justice-involved individuals, including incarcerated
2 individuals, and individuals experiencing institutionalization, are
3 essential stakeholders in the laws and policies affecting their
4 lives, and the voices of these individuals must be represented in
5 civic processes to hold a functioning democracy;

6 (c) People who are in prisons, state hospitals, and residential
7 habilitation centers disproportionately come from marginalized
8 communities. Removing segments of marginalized communities from civic
9 processes through incarceration and institutionalization has a
10 compounding effect that perpetuates the marginalization of
11 disadvantaged communities overall;

12 (d) Crime is a form of divestment from society, the social order,
13 and the common good. Involuntary treatment and institutionalization
14 teach isolation from society when individuals are in the most need of
15 support. Conversely, civic engagement is a form of inclusion and
16 investment in society towards the common good;

17 (e) Individuals experiencing incarceration and
18 institutionalization who invest in society during their incarceration
19 and treatment are less likely to harm society after their release.
20 Civically engaged individuals are essential to reducing harm both
21 during and after their sentence and treatment;

22 (f) Civically engaged individuals help bring underrepresented
23 communities in from the margins, strengthening the fabric of society;
24 and

25 (g) Justice and treatment systems that value rehabilitation and
26 inclusion in society will encourage and facilitate civic engagement
27 and investment in the community.

28 (4) The legislature finds that limiting the civic engagement of
29 individuals serves no compelling governmental interest and has no
30 legitimate penological objective.

31 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** The definitions in this section apply
32 throughout this chapter unless the context clearly requires
33 otherwise.

34 (1) "Civic engagement" means to identify, learn about, and
35 address issues of public concern with the aim to improve the quality
36 of life in a community through political and nonpolitical actions.
37 "Civic engagement" includes learning about ways that individuals can
38 engage in civic systems.

1 (2) "Political advocacy organizations" are groups that are
2 organized by interest or identity that work to uplift the voices of
3 their members and engage civically for the greater good.

4 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 3.** Individuals currently incarcerated in
5 adult and juvenile prisons, individuals living at residential
6 habilitation centers, and individuals receiving treatment in a
7 facility listed in RCW 72.23.175 have a right to civic engagement.
8 All state agencies shall ensure to the greatest extent possible that
9 individuals can fully exercise civic engagement, which includes but
10 is not limited to the rights enumerated as follows:

11 (1) Form political advocacy organizations or groups and/or use
12 current groups or organizations within state institutions for the
13 purpose of civic engagement to work with community members,
14 organizations, institutions, and elected officials and their staff;

15 (2) Organize and communicate with members of community groups,
16 organizations, institutions, and elected officials and their staff;

17 (3) Access classrooms, utility rooms, or other designated program
18 areas within state institutions for group meetings with community
19 members, organizations, institutions, holders of government office,
20 and their staff;

21 (4) Participate in teleconference and videoconference meetings
22 and proceedings with community groups, working groups, legislative
23 bodies, organizations, institutions, panels, or forums; and

24 (5) Be free from punishment or retaliation for participating in
25 civic processes or exercising these rights.

26 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 4.** (1) The legislature finds that the
27 practices covered by this chapter are matters vitally affecting the
28 public interest for the purpose of promoting public safety, human
29 rights, and applying the nothing about us without us act, chapter
30 43.18A RCW, RCW 72.09.135, 13.40.460, 72.05.130, 72.23.030, and
31 72.01.090.

32 (2) An individual's right to civic engagement under section 2 of
33 this act shall not be substantially burdened even if the burden
34 results from a rule of general applicability, unless justified by a
35 compelling state interest achieved by the least restrictive means.

36 (3) Any violation of section 3 of this act must first be
37 addressed through the available administrative remedies. Any internal
38 violation of the administrative policy written and administered by a

1 reviewing agency in addressing a complaint shall constitute
2 administrative exhaustion. Lack of administrative exhaustion shall
3 constitute an affirmative defense against enforcement of this act
4 through judicial intervention.

5 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 5.** (1) If any individual or group seeking to
6 exercise rights enumerated in section 3 of this act believes that an
7 agency is unduly infringing on the exercise of the individual or
8 group's rights, the individual or group may submit a petition to the
9 office of equity. The right to petition the office of equity is
10 independent of the administrative and judicial processes referenced
11 in section 4 of this act and shall not be considered an
12 administrative remedy for the purposes of exhaustion.

13 (2) A civic engagement coordinator is established within the
14 office of equity. The civic engagement coordinator shall:

15 (a) Facilitate communication between individuals and groups
16 exercising rights under section 3 of this act and the agency in which
17 the individual is incarcerated, living, or receiving treatment in;

18 (b) Provide technical assistance to agencies that are required to
19 uphold the rights in section 3 of this act;

20 (c) Accept petitions from individuals or groups seeking to
21 exercise rights under section 3 of this act and determine whether the
22 petition constitutes an exercise of civic engagement rights under
23 section 3 of this act;

24 (d) Upon determining that an activity described in a petition
25 constitutes an exercise of rights under section 3 of this act, notify
26 the applicable agency that the petition is an appropriate exercise of
27 rights and that the agency must permit the individual or group to
28 exercise their rights;

29 (e) Support, as requested, an agency in facilitating all actions
30 necessary for an individual or group to petition the office of equity
31 or exercise civic engagement rights under section 3 of this act,
32 after a petition is reviewed by the civic engagement coordinator;

33 (f) Provide, when requested by the incarcerated or
34 institutionalized individual, and in consultation with the secretary
35 of state where appropriate, civic engagement and voter education
36 programming and information; and

37 (g) Support agencies in establishing, and, when necessary,
38 implementing the compensation process, so that individuals exercising

1 rights enumerated in section 3 of this act are properly compensated
2 when allowed under RCW 43.03.220.

3 (3) The applicable agency shall promptly facilitate all actions
4 necessary for an individual or group to petition the office of equity
5 and for the civic engagement coordinator to perform their
6 responsibilities under this section.

7 (4) The applicable agency shall report to the civic engagement
8 coordinator whether a petition has been resolved 30 days after the
9 civic engagement coordinator has responded to the petition. The
10 agency shall work with the office of equity to facilitate
11 communication with individuals or groups.

12 (5) The office of equity shall develop and implement an
13 accountability process to promote public transparency. Beginning
14 October 31, 2027, and each October 31st thereafter, the office shall
15 submit a report, in compliance with RCW 43.01.036, that includes data
16 on the quantity of civic engagement activities occurring in prisons
17 and institutions. The report must analyze, at a minimum, the
18 requests, petitions, and incidences of completed civic engagement.

19 (6) The office of equity shall coordinate with the secretary of
20 state as needed to facilitate voting access and related activities.

21 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 6.** Nothing in this act shall be construed to
22 apply to local agencies or facilities and institutions which are
23 operated by local agencies.

24 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 7.** Sections 1 through 6 and 8 of this act
25 constitute a new chapter in Title 72 RCW.

26 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 8.** This act takes effect January 1, 2026.

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