

SOUND CITIES ASSOCIATION

2026 State Legislative Agenda



The Sound Cities Association (SCA) urges the Washington State Legislature to adopt a balanced and equitable approach to policymaking that empowers cities to meet the varied and unique needs of communities in King County.

Fund & Support Indigent Defense Services

Cities require sustained state funding, workforce development, and guidance to meet the new indigent defense caseload standards, which are expected to significantly strain local budgets and operations. The projected cost increase for surveyed SCA cities is nearly 700% over ten years, with local funding models disproportionately impacting cities with the most indigent defense cases.

SCA supports:

- State funding for most—if not all—public defense to ensure equity and stability; and,
- Policies that strengthen the public defense workforce.

Expand Access for Public Safety Local Options

SCA cities support a range of state funding sources for public safety and the flexibility to allocate funds based on local priorities. While cities appreciate HB 2015's criminal justice sales tax, restrictive requirements limit cities' ability to access and use the funding effectively.

SCA supports:

- Easing restrictions on eligibility for the HB 2015 sales tax; and,
- Increasing support for public safety workforce and alternative crisis response programs.

Support Local Housing Priorities

Cities request adequate time to implement existing housing regulations before new policies are introduced, along with flexible funding tools to meet both state and local housing goals.

SCA supports:

- Prioritization of incentives over mandates that allow locally tailored approaches that focus on outcomes rather than prescriptive methods;
- Increasing the HB 1590 revenue allocation to cities for housing and behavioral health services from 40% to 50%; and,
- State engagement with cities throughout the legislative process and aligning regulatory efforts, including environmental regulations, with a broader strategy to expand housing supply.

Invest in Local Climate Action

SCA cities ask the state to collaborate more directly with cities to support local climate action. While cities have developed robust climate resilience plans, funding remains a major challenge.

SCA supports:

- Investment in local sustainability efforts; and,
- Providing transparent communication about Climate Commitment Act funding, including outcomes, impacts, and future resources.

Fund & Support Local Transportation Priorities

SCA cities ask the state to provide flexible options for funding local transportation. SCA cities in King County face a major transportation funding gap: the Puget Sound Regional Council's Regional Transportation Plan shows a 45% shortfall for cities compared to much lower gaps for counties and WSDOT.

SCA supports:

- Sustainable state transportation revenue that provides funding for local preservation, maintenance, operations, and safety improvements;
- Implementing a Road Usage Charge with a more balanced revenue distribution than the current gas tax; and,
- Instituting flexible funding options to address growing infrastructure demands.

Support for Safe Use of E-Bikes and E-Motorcycles/E-Dirt Bikes

SCA cities support the use of regulatory and law enforcement strategies to promote the safe and appropriate use of e-bikes and e-motorcycles/e-dirt bikes.

SCA supports:

- Expanded State regulations to address the rising popularity of e-bikes and e-motorcycles/e-dirt bikes among youth to ensure safe use while promoting sustainable transportation
- Adding a definition for e-motorcycles/e-dirt bikes in state code. As e-motorcycles/e-dirt bikes are distinct from both e-bikes and traditional electric motorcycles, a clarifying statewide definition will ensure these emerging technologies are correctly classified and uniformly regulated to ensure public safety and responsible use.

Modernize Liability Laws to Protect Cities and Taxpayers

Cities across King County face rapidly escalating liability costs that strain local budgets, jeopardize essential services, and contribute to long-term fiscal instability. Outdated state liability statutes, including rules governing joint and several liability, admissible medical damages, and the presentation of non-economic damages in court, create conditions where municipalities may be held disproportionately responsible for financial judgments even when their share of fault is limited. These escalating pressures reduce cities' ability to invest in public safety, infrastructure, human services, and other core functions. SCA supports balanced, statewide liability reforms that ensure fair compensation for injured parties while preventing municipalities and taxpayers from bearing disproportionate financial burdens.

SCA supports:

- Updating joint and several liability statutes to ensure that financial responsibility aligns with actual fault, including limiting full liability for defendants whose share of fault is minimal or triggering joint responsibility only when a defendant is found to be primarily at fault.
- Reforming the calculation of medical damages by allowing only actual amounts paid or owed rather than inflated, billed charges—to be considered in settlement and judgment calculations.
- Promoting fairness and transparency in jury awards by ensuring that any stated amounts of non-economic damages presented to a jury are directly tied to evidence rather than arbitrary or speculative anchors.
- Pursuing statewide reforms that protect the long-term financial health of local governments while maintaining equitable access to justice for injured individuals.

SCA Legislative Guiding Principles

SCA supports legislation that aligns with the following guiding principles:

- Advance racial equity and social justice
- Improve the social safety net
- Make no unfunded mandates to cities
- Preserve local decision-making authority