

Wyoming State Visit

On January 24th, CSG West Director, Edgar Ruiz, and accompanying staff visited the Wyoming Legislature to meet with legislative leaders, hear about policy challenges facing the state, and discuss CSG West programming for the upcoming year. During the visit, CSG West staff briefly met with the Senate President and Speaker at the annual Wyoming Women's Caucus Leadership Event, and convened meetings with legislative majority and minority floor leadership, the Legislative Service Director, and the chief of staff to Governor Mark Gordon. The state visit also included a luncheon with alumni from the Western Legislative Academy (WLA) and potential applicants for the 2019 WLA class, as well as a meeting with CSG West Chair-Elect, Senator Michael Von Flatern, about the 2020 CSG West Annual Meeting that will convene in Wyoming.

This year's 65th Wyoming Legislature is a twenty-day budget session. Over 500 bills have been introduced and a number have been controversial in their content thereby driving much debate among lawmakers. Traditionally, the first year's session would be scheduled to end in early March, however, due to circumstances related to budget agreements during last year's session the 2019 session will end early on February 27th. The days not used in this session will be reallocated to the 2020 session to allow for additional budget conversations. At the time of this state visit, legislators had not yet considered the supplemental budget request by Governor Mark Gordon who was sworn in on January 7.

For the second year in a row, Wyoming lawmakers are considering a bill that would increase penalties for interfering with critical infrastructure, with a particular focus on oil and gas facilities. Penalties target trespassing, impeding or damaging facilities, including pipelines, power plants, telecommunications towers, dams, data centers and refineries. Although the bill passed both legislative chambers last year, former Governor Mead vetoed the bill.

Other bills receiving significant debate include a bill that would require women to wait 48-hours after consulting a medical professional to have an abortion. The bill was approved in the House and is now awaiting Senate consideration. Also on the legislative agenda are bills that would eliminate day light saving time, attempt to reduce the gender wage gap in the state, and make it easier for counties to collect ad valorem taxes. Finally, since the legislature may consider Medicaid expansion again, the Senate is considering a bill that would pay for a study to look at everything from the number of people who will be on the program, costs to the state, and determine whether expanding Medicaid will help hospitals with their uncompensated care.

Another high-profile bill being considered would abolish the state's death penalty. Instead of death row, those who are convicted for first-degree murder would get life without parole. Proponents argue that it is time to end the death penalty in the state and that the move will save money. Opponents say the death penalty is an important tool for prosecutors and that Wyoming has a low crime rate because the death penalty is an effective deterrent to criminal behavior.

Finally, over the past year the [CSG Justice Center](#) has worked with the Wyoming Legislature, state agencies, and other stakeholders to find ways to contain correction costs and lower recidivism. The Justice Center, in conjunction with the Wyoming Department of Corrections, sponsored a "Public Safety" day conference that took an in depth look at the corrections system in Wyoming. That work has translated into four bills in this legislative session designed to reform the justice system.

Bills referenced above include:

- [HB10](#) – Crimes Against Critical Infrastructure
- [HB145](#) – Death Penalty Repeal
- [HB140](#) – Abortion 48-Hour Waiting Period
- [HB14](#) – Mountain Daylight Time
- [HB220](#) – National Retail Fairness Act
- [HB84](#) – Wage Equality – State Employees and Programs
- [HB72](#) – Wage Transparency
- [SF146](#) – Medicaid Expansion Study
- [HB53](#) – Probation and Parole – Incentives and Sanctions
- [HB143](#) – Presentence Investigation Reports – Judicial Discretion
- [HB124](#) – Probation and Parole – Earned Compliance Credits
- [SF10](#) – Modification of Probation
- [SF38](#) – Limitation on Length of Probation