



INSPIRE WASHINGTON

Opening doors to science, heritage, and the arts.

Advocacy Guide: ESSB 5814

Instructions, talking points, templates, and tips

We have developed this advocacy guide in response to provisions contained in [Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill \(ESSB\) 5814](#). The recent expansion of what activities are subject to Washington's retail sales tax is a significant financial burden for financially stressed cultural organizations and businesses. It results in increased costs for community members to participate in science, heritage, and arts programs.

Driven by organizational mission, it's Inspire Washington's aim to equip cultural partners with directions, tools, and key talking points to empower advocacy. This guide will also aim to explain how the legislative process works. Let's build a broad coalition and work together to get the attention of state leadership by conveying our stories and the impacts on the communities that count on us! By working together, we may be able to secure legislative support for changes that minimize the impact of ESSB 5814 on cultural organizations.

Who can authorize solutions and when?

To amend state law, we must earn the majority support of the Washington State Legislature followed by the Governor's approval. This work can only happen during the annual Legislative Session: January to March (2026). [Learn how a bill becomes law](#).

What's your/our roles? *Everyone has a role to play, but we know you're busy serving your community. Our plan economizes your time and focuses on manageable tasks for the greatest impact.*

Inspire Washington's work: Drawing upon the expertise of our professional lobbyist, we are developing political strategy and directing grassroots advocacy (your involvement). We are meeting with key members of the Legislature to communicate broad statewide impacts and explore potential solutions. We are also working in concert with allies (state agencies, statewide non-profits, and other sectors).

Your work: First, it's imperative that you collect data to spotlight the impacts of ESSB 5814 on your business, program, and community. From November to January, we need

you to share your story with your district's lawmakers by email or (even better) through an in-person meeting. Bring other people in your network into this work (team, board, volunteers, partners, and audiences/patrons, community, etc.).

Your advocacy calendar:

Collect data and stories (ongoing)

Email your lawmakers (November - December)

Meet with lawmakers (November – December)

Advocate during the Legislative Session (January – March)

Your letter or in-person meeting and who you're contacting:

Do you know who represents you? Find out your district number (location of cultural work and/or home) and who your state senator and representatives are [here](#). If your work and residence are in different districts, you should feel free to contact legislators in both. While you vote in one, you create jobs and economic activity in another! Visit the Legislature's website to learn more about the individual legislators. Email every member of your state district—one senator and two state representatives. It's also helpful to CC their legislative aides. [Here's a legislative roster](#) with all their contact information. You should also send your information about the impacts of 5814 to the cultural sector lead in the Department of Commerce, Shannon Halberstadt, at shannon@commerce.wa.gov.

***Every lawmaker is important, but your advocacy is especially critical if your lawmaker sits on the House Finance or Senate Ways and Means Committees. Click on the committee links and select the drop-down list to see all the members.**

If helpful, a template letter is included at the end of the advocacy guide.

Background, talking points and questions to inspire a robust conversation:

We want you to feel empowered. You have critical information to share and urgent needs to protect your vital cultural organization! You'll need to be thoughtful and sensitive. We have been meeting with legislative leadership and have learned a lot about how to start this conversation. It's important to think about what's on their minds and to recognize the big and difficult picture they are navigating.

The Legislature had the daunting task of fixing a \$16 billion budget shortfall. There were several proposed solutions, but most lacked enough support from a majority of the

legislators. Eventually, with time running out, ESSB 5814 was approved and signed by the governor. Many of the impacts of the legislation were not adequately considered. However, legislators now understand that some clarification of ESSB 5814 may be needed. For instance, many of you may think taxing “live presentation” targets cultural sector work, but we understand the proponents of the legislation had other activities in mind, such as for-profit commercial conferences and webinars. Despite this, unintended consequences matter. This is why legislators need to hear from you!

In summary, lead your conversations with an open mind. Listen closely and understand your legislators’ points of view. Do not dismiss the budget issues since so many critical, quality-of-life programs are facing devastating budget reductions. Of course, advocate for your organizational needs, but with empathy. Ultimately, do your best to position yourself as a partner in the solution-making process and develop trusting relationships with your lawmakers so that you’ll continue to have their ear and earn their support.

Talking points (in your own words):

- The terms used for describing taxable activities are subject to interpretation. While DOR has offered some clarification, there are still a lot of unanswered questions.
- 5814 comes at a difficult time for our fragile cultural organizations. Revenues are flat and expenses are skyrocketing. Implementation of this additional tax comes in the middle of a budget year. *Be specific about the cost impacts for your organization and the challenges/limited options for covering new costs.*
- The COVID-19 pandemic has long-lasting impacts. Cultural engagement (audiences, class registration, etc.) is still at pre-pandemic levels. 5814 increases the cost for cultural experiences which will limit access and participation. *Be specific about the cost impact on your community.*
- Participation in under-resourced communities will be severely impacted, which undercuts Inspire WA’s goal of equitable programming.
- Implementation of 5814 comes when other public funding (federal, state, local, private, etc.) has been severely reduced. *(If your organization receives Cultural Access funding, you may want to omit this messaging or provide further context since legislators may believe your county/city funding is significant.)*
- For non-profits, 5814 creates a new administrative burden. We have never had to figure out what sales tax to impose on services we provide or what sales tax to pay on certain services we receive pursuant to a contract. This may be standard practice for many commercial businesses, but we have a small staff and limited administrative systems and capacity.
- 5814 imposes a particularly onerous burden on cultural education. Additionally, youth need our programs to help mitigate pandemic learning loss, peer connection, and termination of arts and cultural school programs.

Questions to further the conversation:

- What information should I be collecting and sharing with you so that you may better understand the unintended consequences of 5814?
- What other quality-of-life programs are critical to you, and what would you like to know about our programs?
- What leaders and partners should we be talking to generate more conversation and education about 5814?

Follow up:

To help us refine our political strategy, we want to know who you email and meet. We're especially interested in any lawmaker sentiments and feedback you receive. So, we've created a simple and short survey to summarize your outreach for every lawmaker.

[Please complete the lawmaker survey here.](#)

Need help?

This is a lot of information to digest, and advocacy work may be new or confusing to you. You may also have some good ideas that we should consider. Inspire Washington will hold a weekly open office hour to answer your questions and help you strategize.

[Register here!](#)

What's next for advocacy?

- In December, we'll be creating a **public sign-on letter** for cultural businesses, allies, and the people you serve.
- Attend our **Virtual Advocacy Rally** on January 7, 2026! Before the start of the legislative session, we'll update everyone on this advocacy effort, potential solutions, and how you may continue to reach out to your lawmakers. Registration info to come soon.
- Participate in [Arts, Heritage, and Science Week: February 2-6!](#) This annual advocacy event is your chance to urge your lawmakers (virtually or in-person) to support our cultural objectives.

We hope this guide is helpful, informative, motivating, and inspiring! If you have questions, please join one of our open office hours or email:

Manny Cawaling, Executive Director, manny@inspirewashington.org

Jessi Wasson, Deputy Director, jessi@inspirewashington.org

Madeline Dalton, Outreach Coordinator, advocacy@inspirewashington.org

Template letter for requesting an in-person meeting:

Be sure to CC the member's legislative aide since they handle calendaring.

This is just a template. Personalize it as you see fit, especially if you have a personal relationship with them.

Hello [INSERT LAWMAKER NAME],

Happy Holidays! My name is [INSERT NAME] and I'm a community leader providing valuable cultural programming in the district that your constituents count on. I'm writing today to start a conversation about the impact of ESSB 5184 on our community and to request a meeting appointment.

[BRIEFLY DESCRIBE WHO YOU ARE, WHAT YOU DO/ROLE, AND THE IMPACT OF YOUR CULTURAL WORK ON THE COMMUNITY. THIS IS YOUR OPPORTUNITY TO EDUCATE YOUR LAWMAKER ON WHY YOUR WORK MATTERS TO LOCAL EDUCATION, ECONOMY, TOURISM, WORKFORCE, WELLBEING, ETC. BE SPECIFIC. LOCAL REFERENCES ARE HELPFUL AND CONNECTING. IF YOU LIVE IN THE DISTRICT (NOT WORK), SPEAK FROM THE CONSTITUENT POINT OF VIEW. TALK ABOUT CULTURAL WORK IN THE COMMUNITY THAT YOU PARTICIPATE IN.]

I would love to schedule an in-person [OR VIRTUAL] meeting with you. [WILL OTHER OTHER CONSTITUENTS/CULTURAL WORKERS JOIN YOU?] As your constituent, I'd like to share my story about the unintended consequences of the new tax law and the threats this policy poses to our community's valuable cultural programming. I'd also like to learn more about your point of view on this issue. It's my hope that our conversation will provide insight and fuel your discussions during the next legislative session when you represent us.

What is your availability for a meeting between [PROVIDE RANGE OF DATES AND TIME]?
Please let me know.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I'm excited to build a relationship with you that leads to a better quality of life in the district.

Sincerely,

[INSERT NAME]

Template letter for email advocacy:

Be sure to cc the member's legislative aide since they track constituent sentiments.

This is just a template. Personalize it as you see fit, especially if you have a personal relationship with them.

Dear [INSERT LAWMAKER NAME],

I am writing to convey my concerns about ESSB 5814. The expansion of what activities are subject to retail sales tax has created unexpected and significant hardships and confusion for my small cultural organization. As a constituent, I'm sharing my story to provide you with critical information about the unintended consequences of the new tax law. It's my hope that this information will be valuable and fuel discussions during the next legislative session. I'm asking for your help to champion business assistance and community focused solutions. Our district depends on us for quality-of-life programming, and 5814 is threatening our ability to continue providing our uplifting programming.

[BRIEFLY DESCRIBE WHO YOU ARE, WHAT YOU DO, AND THE IMPACT OF YOUR CULTURAL WORK ON THE COMMUNITY. THIS IS YOUR OPPORTUNITY TO EDUCATE YOUR LAWMAKER ON WHY YOUR WORK MATTERS TO LOCAL EDUCATION, ECONOMY, TOURISM, WORKFORCE, WELLBEING, ETC. BE SPECIFIC AND LOCAL REFERENCES ARE HELPFUL AND CONNECTING.]

[DESCRIBE THE IMPACT OF 5814 ON YOUR CULTURAL BUSINESS AND PROGRAMMING. HOW HAS THE LAW INCREASED THE COST OF YOUR PROGRAMMING? SHARE ANY FEEDBACK YOU'VE RECEIVED FROM COMMUNITY MEMBERS ABOUT HIGHER ADMISSION/TUITION/ETC. WHAT IS THE LONG-TERM CONSEQUENCE OF THE HIGHER COSTS AND WHO WILL BE AFFECTED?]

[HAS THE NEW TAX INCREASED YOUR BUSINESS EXPENSES FOR THINGS LIKE DIGITAL ADVERTISING OR OTHER SERVICES? HOW ARE YOU COVERING THOSE NEW BUSINESS EXPENSES AND HOW SUSTAINABLE IS YOUR SITUATION?]

Thank you for giving my concerns time and attention. I'm happy to discuss this further if you'd like more information. I can be reached at [INSERT PHONE NUMBER AND EMAIL ADDRESS.]

I appreciate your service to our community and wish to partner more in the future on sustaining and expanding cultural opportunities in the district.

Sincerely,

[INSERT NAME AND POSITION IN ORGANIZATION]

[INSERT CONTACT INFORMATION]