



2026 Legislative Priorities

Washington's retail industry is one of the state's largest private-sector employers and a cornerstone of local and statewide economic vitality. Yet retailers continue to face rising costs, an uncertain economy, and an increasingly complex web of overlapping state and federal regulations. Declining competitiveness rankings underscore the urgency of restoring a business climate that supports growth, investment, and statewide economic resilience.

The 2026 legislative session offers both challenges and opportunities to advance balanced, predictable policies that strengthen public safety, ensure fair competition, and foster innovation and job growth. As the collective voice for retailers across Washington, the Washington Retail Association advocates for practical, solutions-oriented policies that enhance competitiveness, encourage innovation, and promote safety and accountability, while minimizing unnecessary cost, complexity, and regulatory overlap.

Taxation & Revenue

Despite record tax collections over the past decade, the state's unchecked spending growth has resulted in new and expanded taxes, culminating in the \$9 billion tax package passed in 2025, which disproportionately impacted retailers. The issue lies not in revenue, but in spending priorities and fiscal discipline.

To promote fiscal responsibility and protect businesses:

- Advocate for reducing unnecessary taxes and fees, particularly those that disproportionately impact retailers and small businesses.
- Support legislation that strengthens accountability and makes it more difficult to impose new business taxes without demonstrated fiscal need.
- Oppose any new, retroactive, or expanded taxes or fees enacted to fund unsustainable programs or initiatives lacking transparency and measurable outcomes.
- Advocate for increased note transparency and timely public access to allow meaningful stakeholder engagement.
- Address inflationary pressures on public and private employers by strengthening cost-management in state-run programs to ensure efficiency and affordability.



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Public Safety, Retail Theft, & Organized Retail Crime

Washington continues to experience one of the highest rates of retail theft and organized retail crime (ORC) in the nation. These crimes threaten public safety, jobs, and community stability. WR remains committed to a comprehensive, collaborative approach to address these challenges through prevention, enforcement, and accountability.

To enhance public safety and reduce retail crime:

- Advocate for targeted legislation establishing sentence enhancements and mandatory minimums for ORC and repeat offenders.
- Support funding for small business theft-prevention grants, real-time reporting tools, and expansion of successful retail theft pilot programs.
- Oppose efforts that reduce law enforcement resources or weaken the prosecution of retail and organized theft, which undermine community and business safety.

AI, Data Privacy, & Technology

As artificial intelligence, data privacy, and emerging technologies continue to evolve, policymakers are increasingly focused on oversight, accountability, and appropriate use. While preventing misuse and overreach at both the state and federal levels is important, regulation must remain proportionate and practical—protecting consumers and workers without stifling innovation or the low-risk retail applications that improve efficiency, security, and customer experience.

To encourage balanced and effective policy:

- Support a risk-based approach that focuses oversight on high-risk uses of AI, data, and technology while safeguarding retail innovation.
- Advocate for clear, practical, and proportionate regulations that ensure consistency across jurisdictions and responsibility is clearly and appropriately defined so system developers and data controllers are held accountable for design and performance, while end users like retailers are not liable for factors outside their operational control.
- Oppose broad or ambiguous restrictions on AI, data privacy, and technology that could inadvertently stifle innovation, limit operational efficiency, or discourage technological advancement.



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Employment Law, Labor, & Workforce

Washington's complex and evolving labor laws continue to increase employer costs and administrative burdens. The state's high minimum wage, expansive regulatory activity, and growing use of private rights of action (PRAs) contribute to uncertainty and legal risk. Rising long-term disability costs within one of the nation's most expensive workers' compensation systems threaten its long-term sustainability.

To support a fair balance for workers and manageable costs for employers:

- Support policies that maintain flexibility, address wage compression, and prevent further expansion of costly mandates.
- Monitor implementation of UI benefits for striking workers and rising PFML premium rates, advocating for cost-neutral adjustments.
- Advocate for clarity and consistency in wage, scheduling, and benefits laws to sustain retail viability and predictability.
- Support data-driven, transparent policy solutions grounded in sound insurance principles to sustain fair and stable unemployment insurance and workers' compensation systems that protect both workers and employers.

Consumer Protection

Retailers share lawmakers' goals of protecting consumers and promoting trust. However, overly prescriptive or duplicative regulations can drive up costs, limit product availability, and confuse consumers rather than protect them. Effective consumer protection should strike the right balance between transparency, flexibility, and operational practicality.

To support balanced and effective consumer protection:

- Support clear, consistent standards that address deceptive practices while allowing flexibility for evolving business models and technologies.
- Advocate for reasonable implementation of consumer protection regulations to avoid duplicative or conflicting state and federal-level mandates.
- Oppose overly restrictive or ambiguous consumer protection proposals that create compliance uncertainty, limit affordability, or enable unnecessary litigation through expanded private rights of action.



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Environment & Sustainability

Environmental mandates should balance progress with efficacy and practicality to avoid imposing redundant or punitive costs on businesses already committed to sustainability. Retailers play an essential role in advancing environmental responsibility through supply-chain innovation, packaging reform, and consumer education.

To support innovation and practical environmental stewardship:

- *Identify federal or regional solutions that prevent a patchwork of conflicting state and local rules.*
- *Support science-based, outcome-oriented regulations that balance operational realities with measurable environmental progress.*
- *Oppose excessive or duplicative mandates that hinder proactive businesses, stifle sustainability efforts, or add costs without clear benefits.*
- *Advocate for clear oversight, public reporting, and accountability for all fees collected to fund environmental management or producer-responsibility programs.*

Licensing, Fees, & Payment Costs

The 2025 legislative session revealed a growing trend of using licenses and fees to generate revenue. Retailers also face an expanding patchwork of state and local licensing requirements that increase costs and administrative complexity, making it harder to operate across multiple jurisdictions. In addition, rising interchange and transaction processing fees continue to burden retailers and drive-up consumer costs, often with little transparency or justification.

To ensure a fair and transparent cost environment for retailers:

- *Advocate for transparent and predictable fee structures that reflect actual administrative or service costs and provide reasonable notice before rate increases.*
- *Support efforts to increase transparency and competition in interchange and payment processing fees, ensuring costs are fair, proportionate, and not used as hidden revenue mechanisms.*
- *Monitor proposed increases to ensure they remain equitable across business types and sizes.*
- *Oppose new or duplicative licensing mandates that disproportionately burden small or multi-location retailers or create redundant administrative obligations.*



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Fair Enforcement & Regulation

The legislature's continued reliance on private rights of action (PRAs) to offset fiscal note costs coupled with vague, inconsistent laws increase litigation risk for employers. These provisions often enable opportunistic lawsuits that exploit businesses rather than protect consumers or workers.

To ensure fair and predictable enforcement practices:

- *Support agency-led enforcement as a balanced, transparent alternative to private litigation.*
- *Advocate for "right-to-cure" timelines that allow retailers to correct compliance issues before penalties or lawsuits are filed.*
- *Oppose new PRA provisions that encourage unnecessary litigation, increase costs, and create regulatory uncertainty.*