

# WSPE New

Serving members of the Washington Society of Professional Engineers

## From the President

By Jon Mathison, P.E.

Hello Washington Society of Professional Engineers,

We have strength together as we hold paramount the safety, health, and welfare of the public. We ask you to participate and be active in your local chapter as well as in the state and national organizations. Today's professional engineer has an outsized role to play in ensuring the safety, health, and welfare of the public and it's important that each of us plays our part.

MATHCOUNTS® is calling WSPE.

February ushers in MATHCOUNTS® competitions throughout Washington State and the entire U.S. MATHCOUNTS® is a math competition between middle school teams. If you haven't had the opportunity to witness bright-eyed middle schoolers getting up early on a weekend to attempt difficult math problems for the joy of it – then you're missing out. MATHCOUNTS® was formed 43 years ago in 1983 in a joint effort involving NSPE, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, and CNA Insurance. From humble beginnings it spread quickly in middle schools and is now the most prominent middle school mathematics competition. Please get involved in your local competition!

Washington public investments and WSPE

Legislation at the state level affects WSPE and we try to stay abreast of issues through the Architects & Engineers Legislative Council (AELC). January 12th saw the start of the legislative session and in (2) short months the regular session will finish. We've heard much of proposed tax cuts to k-12 education, higher Ed (UW, WSU, Western, Eastern, Central, Evergreen, and over 30 community/technical colleges), healthcare, low-income housing support, and other public investments. There is also renewed energy this legislative session to make Washington tax code less regressive, that is, fall less squarely on the poor as a proportion of income. House Bill 2100 adds an excise tax on the amount of payroll expenses above the Medicare tax threshold. Senate Bill 6346 proposes to tax annual income greater than \$1M. Our budget is our priority so don't be silent, cuts to education and healthcare or taxes on wealthy individuals and businesses, let your legislators know your priority.



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## From the President (continued)

Rubber meets road with out-of-control highway project spending.

In January the interstate bridge replacement (IBR) project estimate increased from ~\$6B to ~\$18B, a ~300% increase and the cost estimate is not final. Shockingly, those charged with estimating this project concealed these incredible cost increases for a long period of time from the public. WSPE has a long history of fostering transparency in public projects and IBR fell short. IBR started as a one-for-one bridge replacement project over the Columbia River then morphed into widening highways and adding overpasses well away from the bridge. IBR is not alone, there is also concern with wasteful state transportation spending on SR509 in Burien, the trestles on SR2 in Everett, and numerous other highway projects throughout the state. WSDOT has insufficient funds to maintain existing highways and bridges, and the governor recently proposed to borrow money for maintenance. "Congestion relief" does not come from expanding highways that are free for drivers to use due to induced demand. We are ripe for new and different ideas from WSPE members.

Every Transportation project is a climate project

Transportation infrastructure lasts generations and reduces or increases people's energy consumption every day. Decisions by a few PEs today affects so many – even people not yet born. And it affects them far and wide. Last fall Sound Transit opened the Federal Way Link Extension. On March 28th Sound Transit will open the first rail line across a floating bridge. This promises to be a game changer for Bellevue, Kirkland, Redmond, and the region. Significant engineering challenges arose and were overcome. I am grateful that Sound Transit provided multiple tours and talks regarding challenges creating these and other light rail systems to WSPE. We are planning a special joint meeting celebrating the opening of the East Link Extension on March 28th so come join us!

Thank you,

Jon Mathison, P.E.

WSPE President

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WSPE News is edited by B. Philipp with input from Board of Trustees members. Opinions expressed by the authors herein are not necessarily those of the Society. Submissions from all WSPE members are welcome. Please send articles of 250 - 500 words to [bphilipp35@gmail.com](mailto:bphilipp35@gmail.com). Articles may be edited for clarity, grammar, and conciseness.



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# The Colorado Conversion Therapy Lawsuit: Implications for Professional Licensure and Public Safety

## Why Vigilance Is Essential for Licensure Boards and Professional Engineers

A recent lawsuit in Colorado has captured the attention of professionals across various fields, including engineering. In this case, a therapist is challenging a state law that prohibits counselors from practicing conversion therapy, arguing that such restrictions infringe upon free speech rights. The outcome of this lawsuit could impact not only mental health professionals but all regulated professions. For members of the Washington Society of Professional Engineers, it is important to understand the potential implications and prepare for similar challenges that may threaten the integrity and safety of professional practice.

## Background: The Colorado Law and Legal Challenge

Colorado, like many states, has enacted laws banning conversion therapy for minors—a practice widely discredited and considered harmful by major medical and psychological organizations. The law prohibits licensed counselors from offering conversion therapy, aiming to protect vulnerable individuals from unproven and potentially dangerous interventions. A therapist in Colorado, however, has filed a lawsuit challenging this prohibition, claiming that it violates their First Amendment rights to free speech.

## Legal Arguments: Free Speech Versus Professional Regulation

The central argument in the lawsuit is that counseling, including conversion therapy, constitutes protected speech under the First Amendment. The therapist asserts that the government cannot restrict what counselors say to their clients, even if the subject matter is controversial or widely condemned. If the court accepts this reasoning, it could undermine the authority of state governments and professional boards to regulate not just mental health services, but any profession where communication is a core component of practice.

This legal strategy, if successful, could be invoked to challenge licensure requirements and practice standards in fields ranging from engineering and medicine to law and education. By framing professional conduct as "speech," individuals could argue that regulatory oversight infringes upon their constitutional rights, potentially opening the door for unqualified persons to engage in activities that require specialized training and expertise.

## Potential Consequences: Threats to Licensure and Public Safety

A precedent allowing professional practice to be shielded from regulation under the guise of free speech would pose significant risks to public safety. Licensure laws exist to



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## The Colorado Conversion Therapy Lawsuit (continued)

ensure that practitioners meet rigorous educational, ethical, and competency standards. Without these safeguards, the public could be exposed to unqualified individuals making decisions that affect health, safety, and welfare.

In engineering the consequences of unlicensed or incompetent practice can be catastrophic—ranging from structural failures to environmental disasters. The same principle applies across regulated professions: licensure is not simply a bureaucratic hurdle, but a vital mechanism for protecting society from harm.

Professional licensure serves several essential functions. It establishes minimum qualifications, promotes ethical conduct, and provides a framework for accountability. Regulatory boards are empowered to investigate complaints, discipline practitioners, and revoke licenses when necessary to safeguard the public interest.

### Recommendations: Vigilance for Licensure Boards

Given the potential for legal challenges modeled after the Colorado lawsuit, licensure boards in Washington and other states must remain vigilant. Boards should:

- Monitor legal developments in other jurisdictions, especially cases involving the intersection of free speech and professional regulation.
- Review current statutes and regulations to ensure they are robust and defensible in court.
- Educate stakeholders—practitioners, policymakers, and the public—about the importance of licensure and the risks posed by unqualified practice.
- Collaborate with professional associations to advocate for strong regulatory frameworks and share best practices.
- Prepare to respond proactively to legal challenges by engaging legal counsel and developing clear, evidence-based arguments for the necessity of licensure.

The Colorado conversion therapy lawsuit represents more than a dispute over counseling practices. It is a test of the government’s ability to regulate professions in the interest of public safety. As professional engineers, and as members of a broader community committed to high standards, it is important to recognize the stakes and advocate for the continued authority of licensure boards. Vigilance and preparedness are essential to preserving the integrity of regulated professions and protecting the public from harm.

The Washington Society of Professional Engineers encourages all members and regulatory boards to stay informed, participate in policy discussions, and defend the principles that underpin safe and competent professional practice.



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# Legislative Update

By Ken McGowan, PE, F.NSPE

## AELC Bill Status & Upcoming Events Report

### Upcoming Events

#### Local Government (Senate) - SHR 3 and Virtual JACB - 2/2 @ 1:30pm

- [SB 6309](#) - Exec Session - Providing for enhanced municipal permitting tools for high capacity transit projects.

#### Local Government (House) - HHR E and Virtual JLOB - 2/3 @ 10:30am

- [HB 2517](#) - Exec Session - Providing for enhanced municipal permitting tools for high capacity transit projects.
- [HB 2141](#) - Public Hearing - Concerning building codes. (Remote Testimony Available).

#### Ways & Means (Senate) - SHR 4 and Virtual JACB - 2/3 @ 4:00pm

- [SB 6047](#) - Exec Session - Concerning statutory guidelines for the administration of state capital projects.

#### Business, Trade & Economic Development (Senate) - SHR 2 and Virtual J.A. Cherberg - 2/4 @ 8:00am

- [SB 6312](#) - Exec Session - Prohibiting surveillance-based price discrimination and surge pricing for retail goods.

#### Civil Rights & Judiciary (House) - HHR A and Virtual JLOB - 2/4 @ 8:00am

- [HB 2255](#) - Exec Session - Concerning litigation finance.



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## Legislative Update (continued)

### Local Government (House) - HHR E and Virtual JLOB - 2/4 @ 8:00am

- [HB 2517](#) - Exec Session - Providing for enhanced municipal permitting tools for high capacity transit projects.

### Early Learning & K-12 Education (Senate) - SHR 1 and Virtual J.A. Cherberg - 2/4 @ 10:30am

- [SB 6263](#) - Exec Session - Updating school district public bid limits.

### Housing (Senate) - SHR 4 and Virtual JACB - 2/4 @ 10:30am

- [SB 6015](#) - Exec Session - Concerning permit-ready residential building plans.

### Capital Budget (House) - HHR B and Virtual JLOB - 2/4 @ 4:00pm

- [HB 2273](#) - Public Hearing - Reducing embodied carbon emissions of buildings and building materials. (Remote Testimony Available).

### Appropriations (House) - HHR A and Virtual JLOB - 2/5 @ 10:30am

- [SHB 2105](#) - Public Hearing - Concerning immigrant worker protections. (Remote Testimony Available).
- [SHB 2144](#) - Public Hearing - Requiring notices to employees when electronic monitoring is used to assist employers conducting performance evaluations. (Remote Testimony Available).
- [SHB 2345](#) - Public Hearing - Concerning contributions in the state paid family and medical leave program. (Remote Testimony Available).



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# WSPE EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION REPORT

The Educational Foundation was very successful in its Fall Fundraising Campaign this year. Over \$10,000 was raised. Thank you to all WSPE members who participated. The Foundation greatly appreciates your support.

As a result of the fundraising and income earned from the scholarship endowment, the Foundation has sufficient funding available to award four \$3,000 scholarships this year. Last fall, the Foundation was able to award scholarships to six outstanding community college students.

The Foundation offers \$3,000 scholarships to students enrolled in Washington community colleges who transfer to ABET-accredited baccalaureate engineering programs offered by universities and colleges located in Washington State.

The scholarship application form can be accessed on the WSPE website <https://washingtonengineer.org/>. Scholarship applications must be submitted by May 1.

Please help the Foundation by encouraging qualified individuals to apply for a scholarship.

## Support Washington Engineering Students

The WSPE Education Foundation provides scholarships to students enrolled in Washington Community Colleges who transfer to ABET-accredited baccalaureate engineering programs offered by universities and colleges in Washington State. As WSPE members develop their estate plans, the Foundation provides an opportunity for investing in the education of future engineers for the state.

Legacy gifts to the Foundation will be invested in its Scholarship Endowment that is used to earn income for scholarship use. Past WSPE members have chosen to include the Foundation in their wills. If you are interested in considering making a legacy gift in your estate plan and have questions, please contact

Steven M. Short, P.E., Foundation Treasurer,  
2311 Ferndale Avenue, Richland, WA, 99354-1926  
or by e-mail at [sgshorts@gmail.com](mailto:sgshorts@gmail.com).

The Foundation is tax exempt under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.



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# Board of Registration for Professional Engineers and Land Surveyors (BRPELS) Update

By Doug Hendrickson, PE, F.NSPE, [BRPELS](#) Board Member

- BRPELS is meeting on 2/11-12, virtually with physical access at their office in Olympia.
  - Primary BRPELS activities in the upcoming meeting are discussion of actions and supports necessary to advance current legislative proposal for revision of RCW 18.43, normal enforcement considerations, and succession of the agency Director who will be retiring at year end.
  - BRPELS will be considering reducing meetings to roughly quarterly with intermittent 'snap' virtual topic meetings. Admittedly 'snap' still must meet public notice requirements for public hearings.
  - NCEES Western Zone (11 states and jurisdictions) is meeting in April in Bend, Oregon. Anticipated actions include smoothing transitions upon Structural depth segments in examination.

## Mathcounts Update

By Doug Hendrickson, PE, F.NSPE, Washington State [Mathcounts](#) Coordinator

- TriCities Competition will be the first in the State on 2/7 followed by Southwest and Spokane on 2/21 with all remaining competitions on 2/28. Those on 2/28 include: Seattle, Lake Washington, North Puget Sound, and Mt. Rainier
- Hendrickson will travel to Burien to conduct the Mt. Rainier competition. Members in the vicinity are requested to reach out to Doug @ [DougHendricksonPE@gmail.com](mailto:DougHendricksonPE@gmail.com) to volunteer.
- The State competition will be March 7th at Microsoft in Redmond. We are very happy to have Microsoft offer to host the venue and to allow us to bypass their contracted caterer in provisioning the competition.



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# News and Events

## • Bylaws

- Bylaw changes were drafted for conformance with National standards and currency.  
The revised Bylaws will be provided for motion and approval at the BOT meeting.

## Engineers Week (February 22-28, 2026)

is a great opportunity to engage with your stakeholders - including non-members and legislators - to promote the profession, talk about public health, safety, and welfare + plant the seeds for future engineers!

In November, NSPE launched a toolkit (<https://www.nspe.org/leadership-toolbox/engineers-week-2026-state-society-toolkit>) that includes "plug and play" resources such as social media graphics and Zoom backgrounds.

## Links

1. NSPE Board of Directors Update, January 2024 ([link](#)).
2. NSPE Update, April 2024 ([link](#)).
3. NSPE Daily Designs (Business News for PEs) ([link](#))



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