



Statewide Association **Keeps Independent Grocers In Business** With Proactive Local Government Monitoring



Timely alerts from Curate give government affairs team a chance to engage local leaders on controversial proposals before a vote

Trendy Regulations Threaten Small Grocers With Extinction

Independent grocery stores and convenience stores in Washington state operate on razor-thin margins—so thin that even small changes to their expenses can put them out of business. Yet these businesses, which are often family-owned, play a vital role in their communities as one of the only sources of fresh food and groceries.

The Washington Food Industry Association advocates for the interests of independent grocers, convenience stores, and their suppliers across the state at every level of government. Prior to adopting real-time local government monitoring software from Curate, the association regularly missed ordinances that increased costs for members.



COVID-19 Prompts National Wave of Hazard Pay Legislation

In response to the increased health risk grocery store workers have faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, many municipalities have proposed or passed hazard pay legislation for grocery store employees.

In Washington, **at least five cities or counties have passed some form of hazard pay** legislation, increasing the pay of certain public-facing grocery employees by up to \$5 an hour.

Catherine Holm, legal counsel and government affairs director for the Washington Food Industry Association says many of the independent grocers the association represents already pay employees wages that are significantly higher than minimum wage and higher than the industry standard across the country. While publicly traded national grocery chains saw profits increase during the pandemic,

smaller independent chains have struggled to stay afloat as consumers shifted to shopping online.

For these smaller grocery stores, a \$4 to \$5 hazard pay wage increase could mean **\$30,000 to \$80,000 a month in increased expenses**, which could be enough to force them out of business.

Plastic Bans Impact Independent Stores And Consumers

Another local issue with the potential to disrupt or shutter independent grocers is the trend to ban all plastic bags and packaging.

These bans pose a threat to small grocers because many of their suppliers have not switched to plastic-free packaging. When plastic bans go into effect, many grocers are forced to stop carrying products, which impacts their revenues and can raise costs for consumers.

Advocacy Group Catches Issues Before Decision-points

The Washington Food Industry Association, an advocacy group representing the independent grocery and convenience store industries in Washington State, is most effective when it can engage with local officials before they hold a vote on an issue.

Before finding Curate, the association relied on a national lobbying firm to catch issues at the state and local level. However, the wide variation in timing for issues at the local level—from issues that string along for months to issues that get decided within 24 hours after proposal—meant that the alerts from the lobbying firm often arrived long after a decision had already been made.



Prior to using the Curate service, the organization missed the opportunity to weigh in about a hazard pay ordinance in Seattle, which ended up costing one grocery store owner \$20,000 extra per week.

Washington Food Industry Association Steps Up Advocacy

Holm says Curate has been a gamechanger for the association.

With real-time alerts from Curate, Holm has been able to ensure independent grocers' voices are heard on more local issues than ever before.

“Even when we’ve been looking, we haven’t seen something, but Curate will find it,” she says.

She now organizes her week around her Monday Curate report, prioritizing actions related to wage increases and plastic bans early in the week, and then looking into the other less pressing issues throughout the rest of the week.

Using Curate, Holm got notice around 10 a.m. on a Monday of a city council meeting scheduled for that evening, with another hazard pay proposal on the agenda. She immediately sent out an action alert to members, and got the city to delay a vote until officials could study the issue further.

“Because we were able to catch it in time, they stopped what they were going to do,” she says. “They were going to go through without any input from us.”

Holm says that using Curate has likely saved independent grocers in Washington state more than \$1 million on the issue of hazard pay alone.



About Washington Food Industry Association

The Washington Food Industry Association is a non-profit, statewide trade association made up of independent grocers, convenience stores, and coffee houses throughout Washington state. Since 1899, the association has provided educational resources, offered cost containment programs, and engaged members in grassroots advocacy campaigns to help independent grocers compete with national chains.



About Curate

Curate is a civic intelligence company providing local government monitoring software that tracks meeting minutes and agenda items from 12,000+ municipalities. Government affairs teams use Curate to gain more visibility into local government activities in order to monitor risk, advance key initiatives and spot opportunities.