SENATE BILL REPORT
SB 6061

As of January 22, 2026

Title: An act relating to establishing a tourism self-supported assessment program to fund statewide tourism promotion.

Brief Description: Establishing a tourism self-supported assessment program to fund statewide tourism promotion.

Sponsors: Senators Riccelli, Cleveland, Liias, Nobles and Wilson, C..

Brief History:
Committee Activity: Business, Trade & Economic Development: 1/22/26.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Authorizes the Washington Tourism Marketing Authority (WTMA) to develop by rule a self-supported assessment program to fund statewide tourism.
- Creates an oversight board within the WTMA to govern the self-supported assessment program.
- Modifies the membership of the WTMA Board of Directors.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON BUSINESS, TRADE & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Staff: William Bridges (786-7312)

Background: Washington Tourism Marketing Authority. The Legislature created the Washington Tourism Marketing Authority (WTMA) in 2018 as a public entity to manage financial resources and contract statewide tourism marketing services. The WTMA is governed by a thirteen-member board of directors. Four members are legislators representing their respective Senate and House caucuses, each appointed by their respective presiding officers. Nine members are appointed by the Governor, representing the tourism

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industry and related businesses including, but not limited to, hotel, restaurant, outdoor recreation, attractions, retail, and rental car businesses. The Governor's appointments must reflect diversity in geography, size of business, gender, and ethnicity. No county may have more than two appointments and no city may have more than one appointment. Appointment terms are four years. Members serve without compensation but are entitled to reimbursement for expenses incurred, solely from the funds of the WTMA.

The WTMA board is assisted by a nonvoting advisory committee with at least four members: an ex officio representative from the Department of Commerce, a representative from the State Parks and Recreation Commission, a representative from the Department of Transportation, and one member from a federally recognized Indian tribe. The WTMA may appoint other state agency representatives as it deems appropriate. The Department of Commerce provides administrative assistance to the WTMA and serves as its fiscal agent for appropriated moneys.

Washington Tourism Marketing Authority's Budget. Up to $3 million from revenue per biennium from a 0.2 percent tax collected on retail sales of lodging, car rentals, and restaurants may be deposited into the Statewide Tourism Marketing Account (STM Account). Money in the STM Account can only be spent after appropriation. Allowable expenses include entering into a contract for a multiple-year statewide tourism marketing plan with an existing statewide nonprofit organization, which must include focuses on:

- rural tourism-dependent counties;
- natural wonders and outdoor recreation opportunities of the state;
- attraction of international tourists;
- identification of local offerings for tourists;
- assistance for tourism areas adversely impacted by natural disasters;
- contracting for the evaluation of the impact of the statewide tourism marketing program; and
- administrative expenses of the WTMA.

Tourism Self-Supported Assessment Advisory Group. In 2025, the Legislature required the chair of the WTMA's board of directors to appoint a Tourism Self-Supported Assessment Advisory Group (Advisory Group) composed of representatives from various sectors of the Washington tourism industry, including:

- two members of the lodging sector;
- one member of the beverage sector;
- one member representing the arts and culture sector;
- one member representing the tour operators sector;
- one member representing the attractions sector;
- one member representing the transportation sector; and
- one member representing a statewide Washington tourism promotion nonprofit.

The Advisory Group expires on June 1, 2026.

Purpose of the Tourism Self-Supported Assessment Advisory Group. The Advisory Group was tasked with evaluating the viability of an industry self-supported assessments to fund statewide tourism promotion and recommending procedures to establish the self-supported assessment. Key elements of self-supported assessments were specified in the legislation, such as the classification of businesses proposed to be included in the assessment and the assessment methodology.

The Advisory Group delivered its report to the Legislature on October 31, 2025. The report makes the following recommendations regarding a self-supported assessments program to promote tourism.

Classification Structure of Businesses. Self-supported assessments should apply to seven business classifications:

- lodging;
- travel services;
- attractions, arts and culture;
- recreation;
- beverage industry;
- restaurants and drinking places; and
- retail, such as department stores and general merchandise.

Assessment Methodology and Petition Process. The type of self-supported assessments and proposed budget should be determined by a ballot package approved by industry ratification.

Assessment Rate. Self-supported assessments should be based on a percentage of gross revenue.

Characteristics of Businesses in Each Classification. Businesses in each classification should serve travelers directly and their success relies on visitor spending linked to destination appeal, accessibility, and marketing.

Duration of Self-Assessments. Self-supported assessments should operate on six-year terms.

Oversight Board of Ratepayers. Self-supported assessments should be self-governed by a board composed of ratepayers.

Agricultural Commissions and Boards. Washington has 21 agricultural commodity commissions and boards that engage in marketing and research related to a specific commodity. Eight of the commissions are established in statute and 13 are established by the Department of Agriculture by rule. All of the commissions and boards are funded by producer assessments ratified by their specific industry.

Summary of Bill: Declaring the Legislature's Intent. Among other things, the Legislature

declares that a stable and predictable funding mechanism, developed and governed by the industry through a self-supported assessment, can generate substantial economic returns for the state and empower local businesses, destinations, and communities to compete on a level playing field with neighboring states and national leaders such as California, Oregon, and British Columbia.

Defining Terms. Various terms are defined; for example, tourism business means businesses that derive a significant portion of revenue from tourism activity in Washington in the following sectors: lodging, travel services, attractions, recreation, and beverage producers.

Authorizing a Tourism Assessment Program. The Legislature authorizes the WTMA to establish a tourism assessment program by rule, subject to ratification by the tourism businesses. The assessments shall be calculated as a percentage of gross revenue and collected annually. An unpaid assessment constitutes a debt to the state, subject to a penalty of up to 10 percent of the unpaid assessment, and may be recovered by civil action. When designing the program, the WTMA must give substantial weight to the recommendations made by the Tourism Self-Supported Assessment Advisory Group in its October 31, 2025, report to the Legislature.

Creating a Rate Payer Oversight Board. The WTMA is required to appoint members of a Rate Payer Oversight Board (Oversight Board) consisting of at least ten members, with at least two representatives from each of the identified tourism businesses. For the initial Oversight Board, the Tourism Self-Supported Assessment Advisory Group, shall prepare a list of nominees for appointment, all of whom must be employees or officers of businesses subject to any proposed assessment. Initial terms of the Oversight Board shall be six months or until completion of the initial referendum. Subsequent appointments shall be made under the process designed by the Oversight Board and properly ratified.

Describing the Duties of the Rate Payer Oversight Board. The ratepayer oversight board shall design the assessment program, which shall include the following components:

- sector-specific classifications;
- assessment methodology and the rates for each business sector;
- a referendum process for ratification;
- opt-out provisions, if applicable;
- revenue thresholds for businesses assessed in each sector, where applicable;
- program term length; and
- appointment process for the ratepayer oversight board following the initial appointments of the Oversight Board.

The Oversight Board shall govern the activities of the tourism assessment program. Additional duties of the Oversight Board include:

- approving an annual budget and expenditure plan;
- providing an annual report to the WTMA and the Legislature; and

- monitoring program effectiveness and recommend adjustments.

Describing the Ratification Process. The timing and process for ratifying the proposed assessment program is described, including how weighted votes are calculated. The Oversight Board shall conduct a referendum among affected businesses to ratify the proposed assessment program within three years of the passage of this legislation. The initial referendum must be approved by a majority of the weighted votes cast at the referendum. In the case of a failed ratification, the Oversight Board may continue to resubmit the same proposal or a modified proposal beyond the three-year limitation.

Extending the Tourism Self-Supported Assessment Advisory Group. The Advisory Group is extended one year to June 1, 2027.

Changing the Board Membership of the Washington Tourism Marketing Authority. The WTMA Board is changed. Instead of the gubernatorially appointed nine members representing the tourism industry and related businesses, the Governor appoints 13 members as follows: eight members representing businesses paying the ratified assessments and that are nominated by the Oversight Board, except that the initial members shall be nominated by the Advisory Group; two members representing destination marketing organizations; and three members representing tourism businesses. The legislative membership is not changed. The requirement that gubernatorial appointments reflect diversity in geography, size of business, gender, and ethnicity is removed. The requirement that no county may have more than two gubernatorial appointments and no city may have more than one gubernatorial appointment is also removed.

Creating the Tourism Assessment Account. Collected assessments shall be deposited in a separate account, named the Tourism Assessment Account, in any bank that is a state depositary. Collected assessments are not state money, common cash, or revenue to the state, and are not subject to legislative appropriation. Specific legislative appropriation is not required to expend or disburse money from the account. Statutory provisions regarding the daily remittance of moneys to the state treasurer do not apply to the account. Funds in the account must be used solely for tourism promotion and administrative and enforcement costs.

Providing for the Confidentiality of Records. Financial and commercial information submitted to the WTMA and the Oversight Board to implement the tourism assessment program is confidential and exempt from the Public Records Act. General statistical summaries that do not identify individual businesses are allowed.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 19, 2026.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: Tourism is one of Washington's largest export industries, but it lacks the tools other states use to grow market share. Washington is underinvesting in tourism compared to peer states like Oregon, California, and Colorado. Current tourism funding is fragmented, inconsistent, and insufficient to support a statewide strategy.

The proposed program gives the tourism industry an additional tool to help itself, by pooling resources for impact that no individual business could achieve alone. The program will be accountable to the tourism industry because it is designed, governed, and overseen by the businesses that pay into it through a ratepayer oversight board. This bill builds directly on last session's work in SB 5492, which created a tourism self-assessment advisory committee made up of industry stakeholders.

This bill is the culmination of years of work by tourism industry members from every region of our state. A model like this can yield $25 million in annual program funding that is sustainable, predictable and competitive. And that industry investment can return an estimated $14.6 billion in visitor spending to Washington over the next decade.

The last two years have been difficult for the WA wine industry. Most wineries have seen a decline in tourist visits to tasting rooms, with declining foot traffic and on-premises wine sales. Tourists in wineries declined alongside those realities. For wineries to survive, we must have wine-loving tourists from around the world choose Washington. This bill would greatly enhance the efforts to provide much-needed wine tourism.

Friendly amendments will be offered to add additional industry sectors, adjust the size of restaurants eligible for program participation, encourage geographic representation on the WTMA board, and align the bill with the commodity commission enforcement process.

Washington has no shortage of unique attractions and destinations, and there's a good chance you'll find a craft brewery in the vicinity of many of them. A strong and sustainable tourism strategy directly benefits our breweries, which are a significant draw for both in-state and out-of-state visitors.

Tourism is vital for hotels and restaurants. A decline in tourism results in negative economic consequences. This bill will put those who pay for marketing in the driver's seat with a meaningful voice in the process.

Rural parts of the state, such as northeast Washington, have natural beauty and recreation opportunities, but they are geographically remote with limited tourism promotion dollars. Funding providing by a statewide program is vital for the promotion of tourism in these areas.

Tourism is foundational to the Port of Seattle ability to serve as one of Washington's economic engines. The Port has partnered with the state in the past to support sustainable tourism initiatives. Recent events have challenged the state's chronically underfunded efforts. This bill will provide the dedicated resources necessary to support tourism and the economic benefits that follow.

CON: Why is cannabis, crude oil, and gaming mentioned in the bill? What do they have to do with tourism promotion?

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Marcus Riccelli, Prime Sponsor; David Blandford, State of Washington Tourism; Annie McGrath, State of Washington Tourism; Anthony Anton, Washington Hospitality Association; Josh McDonald, Washington Wine Institute; Daniel Olson, WA Brewers Guild; Shelly Stevens, Tri County Economic Development District (TEDD); Fred Felleman, Port of Seattle.

CON: Jeff Pack, Washington Citizens Against Unfair Taxes.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.