

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM. I'm Jim Burke, with local news and commentary for Thursday, February 2, 2023.

Washington State's Department of Health (DOH) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) are investigating a cluster of antibiotic-resistant infections that may be linked to EzriCare Artificial Tears. The infections have been caused by a variant of *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*, a bacterium that is commonly found in water and soil and can infect the eyes, lungs, and blood. *Pseudomonas* infections are most commonly seen in hospital settings, particularly among people with weakened immune systems. Epidemiologists have identified 50 cases of *Pseudomonas* infections in 11 states since May of last year. The infections have caused hospitalizations, vision loss, and the death of one patient from a blood infection. One of the identified cases is from Washington state.

The public is urged to stop using EzriCare Artificial Tears until further notice, and to contact their medical provider if they have concerns. Symptoms of an eye infection include pain, swelling, discharge, redness, blurry vision, sensitivity to light and the feeling of a foreign object in the eye. For more information about *Pseudomonas*, visit the CDC website (<https://www.cdc.gov/hai/organisms/pseudomonas.html>).

Washington's Working Families Tax Credit (WFTC) officially launched yesterday, February 1. For qualified families, this credit will provide for up to a \$1,200 cash refund. Roughly 400,000 households will qualify. The application portal is now open on the state Department of Revenue's website (<https://workingfamiliescredit.wa.gov/>). Yesterday's launch marks a major step forward in the progress Washington has made towards building an economy that works for everyone. In recent years, that effort has included changing the state's tax system to support the economic wellbeing of working families.

In 2021, an analysis found that low-income Washingtonians pay 17% of their income in taxes while middle-class people pay 11% and the wealthiest pay just 3%. Programs like the WFTC are righting this upside-down tax structure by making Washington's tax system less regressive. Gordon McHenry, Jr., United Way of King County's CEO, powerfully summed up the work that it has taken to launch the WFTC at today's press event. McHenry said, "The journey to an equitable society takes time, intentionality, good policy. and good partners." The credit was designed to be available to undocumented workers and those who use an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number to do their taxes.

Sterling Harders, president of SEIU 775 (<https://seiu775.org/>), highlighted that key characteristic at today's press event, saying that Washington built, "immigrant inclusion into the launch of this credit from day one." She noted that inclusivity was important to the coalition, "because here in Washington, we recognize the dignity of every single person in our community." Gov. Jay Inslee signed the legislation to implement and expand the tax credit in 2021. The effort to pass the credit was a bipartisan effort that included leadership from both sides of the aisle, including State Representatives My-Linh Thai and Drew Stokesbary. Information regarding eligibility and an application for the WFTC can be found here on the transcript (see links above).

Included in the transcript of today's news is an article (<https://www.nytimes.com/article/green-comet-watch.html>) from *The New York Times* about the so-called "green comet" that is at its closest point to earth tonight, but here in western Washington there are nothing but cloudy conditions. If the sky miraculously clears, look to the northern sky in the space between the two stars that make up the end of the dipper in the Big Dipper or Ursa Major. They are the two stars that point to the north star. If clouds are not an issue where you are, and

you live anywhere in the mainland US or Canada, grab your binoculars and go. Before dawn is best, as the waxing moon will have set by then.

And one more thing: This coming Monday February 6, at 9:45am, KPTZ will broadcast the Public Health Report to the Jefferson County Board of County Commissioners from Public Health Director Dr. Allison Berry, and Director of Emergency Management Willie Bence. Submit your public health questions about COVID-19, RSV, Flu or any other thing by emailing contactus@kptz.org by noon tomorrow, Friday, February 3.

KPTZ 91.9 FM brings you local news at noon and five Monday through Friday and at noon on Saturday. You can contact us through news@kptz.org. This is Jim Burke. Thanks for listening and have a healthy weekend.