CHRISTINE O. GREGOIRE
Governor

STATE OF WASHINGTON
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
P.O. Box 40002 • Olympia, Washington 98504-0002 • (360) 753-6780 • www.governor.wa.gov

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TO: Robin Arnold-Williams, Secretary
Department of Social and Health Services

Charles Earl, Executive Director
State Board for Community and Technical Colleges

Karen Lee, Commissioner
Employment Security Department

Victor Moore, Director
Office of Financial Management

Juli Wilkerson, Director
Department of Community, Trade, and Economic Development

FROM: Christine O. Gregoire, Governor Chris

SUBJECT: MODIFICATIONS TO WORKFIRST REFORM DIRECTIVE

I am very pleased with the progress that you have made implementing my November 10, 2005, directive on reforms to the WorkFirst program. I am confident that when fully implemented, these reforms will change the culture of our agencies, improve our service delivery and better achieve the important contributions the WorkFirst program makes in the quality of life for the individuals, families and children who most need our help.

My original directive required that the implementation of the non-compliance sanction begin on December 1, 2006. Since that timeframe was established, however, several issues have come up that require us to modify that date. First, the Federal Appropriations Act has passed, and we now know that the new rules related to work participation for WorkFirst families will not be available until July 1, 2006. Certainly we want to make sure our reforms are consistent with these new rules.

Second, we must ensure that we take the time needed to successfully achieve the comprehensive cultural and process changes within your agencies that this reform requires. These changes must be fully supported through staff training at the local level that clearly communicates to employees our expectations for client engagement and our renewed focus on work. We have recently been informed that these changes will take more time than originally expected.

And finally, delays have occurred in modifying the technology needed to support implementing these reforms. Since this technology is a cornerstone for the reform and will not be available until June 1, 2006, I am directing you to defer the effective date for imposing a non-compliance sanction until March 1, 2007, rather than December 1, 2006. All other approaches to implementing sanctions including offering each of the families in sanction a comprehensive evaluation, providing additional time for families and recipients to become re-engaged, and making the necessary rule changes remain the same.

My decision to defer the implementation of the non-compliance sanction by a few months should not be interpreted as a change in my beliefs or values. I articulated those values in the attached original directive and my vision for the WorkFirst Program holds firm: ***work is the best force to break the cycle of poverty for families.*** We will do all that we must to protect children, and we will also work with and, where needed, sanction parents who purposely avoid their responsibility to take good care of and provide for their children.

All of us should take confidence from the recent review by the University of Washington confirming that we are taking the correct approach on the proposed non-compliance sanction policies. This review reinforced my commitment to assure that the state does its part to help families become self-sufficient. I am also pleased to have been asked to participate with other governors in the National Governors' Association work group that will help guide the implementation of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) provisions of the Federal Deficit Reduction Act. As you know, the TANF provisions establish new work participation rates, modify activities that are counted towards participation, and establish new reporting requirements, which will make it difficult for our state to be in compliance. The changes I have asked you to make will help Washington be in a better position to meet the new requirements.

I look forward to receiving the results of your first Government Management, Accountability and Performance (GMAP) review held last week and ask that you continue to use data to understand, manage, and bring about real results through the WorkFirst program. Thank you for your continued leadership in moving forward with the WorkFirst reform. Please thank your staff for the excellent work they have done in supporting the reform efforts.