

VETO MESSAGE ON ESSB 5921

June 15, 2011

To the Honorable President and Members,
The Senate of the State of Washington

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am returning herewith, without my approval as to Sections 3 and 26, Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill 5921 entitled:

"AN ACT Relating to social services."

This omnibus bill addresses redesign and policy changes to Washington's WorkFirst program, including provisions related to eligibility, accountability, fraud detection and enforcement. During the current economic downturn the state has experienced increased utilization of safety net programs. Now is the time to redouble our focus on service delivery that meets the intended outcomes and ensures fiscal accountability for the use of limited public funds.

Section 3 of the bill requires the Department of Social and Health Services to engage in competitive performance-based contracting for all WorkFirst activities. I strongly support government efficiency and improved performance in providing critical services to Washington residents. However, Section 3 of the bill is not needed and could create confusion about the applicable law that would govern such contracting. The Legislature enacted a law in 1997, codified as RCW 74.08A.290, that authorized the Department of Social and Health Services to engage in competitive contracting using performance-based contracts to provide all work activities. The Department of Social and Health Services would be expressly mandated to exercise its authority granted in 1997 under RCW 74.08A.290 by Second Engrossed Substitute House Bill 1087, a bill among those I sign today. I will direct the Department of Social and Health Services and the WorkFirst Subcabinet to act on the Legislature's direction in Second Engrossed Substitute House Bill 1087 to competitively contract all work activities under the 1997 law.

Section 26 of the bill establishes a Fraud Ombudsman in the State Auditor's Office to audit and provide oversight of the Office of Fraud and Accountability at the Department of Social and Health Services. Transparency of public funds is critically important. I remain committed to ensuring appropriate use of public funds when providing critical services for the State's most vulnerable residents.

However, Section 26 is duplicative of the State Auditor's Office existing authority to audit the work of the Office of Fraud and Accountability. The Department of Social and Health Services will provide the State Auditor's Office with access to any relevant records in its possession to the fullest extent practicable upon the request of the State Auditor's Office.

For these reasons, I have vetoed Sections 3 and 26 of Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill 5921.

With the exception of Sections 3 and 26, Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill 5921 is approved.

Respectfully submitted,
Christine Gregoire
Governor