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SENATE BILL 6168

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State of Washington

56th Legislature

2000 Regular Session

By Senators Fairley, Patterson and Kline

Read first time 01/10/2000. Referred to Committee on Human Services & Corrections.

1 AN ACT Relating to the department of social and health services  
2 phone answering system; adding a new section to chapter 43.20A RCW; and  
3 creating a new section.

4 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

5 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** The legislature finds that persons in need  
6 of services provided by the department of social and health services  
7 are often frustrated in their attempts to receive information or  
8 resolve problems with the department by the use of complex automated  
9 voice mail systems. Instead of being able to access a live person, who  
10 could answer their questions or direct their calls, clients of the  
11 department are subjected to a series of automated voice mail options,  
12 often with no forwarding to a live employee. Messages left on voice  
13 mail frequently do not receive a prompt response. In view of the  
14 serious, and at times even life-threatening, nature of many of the  
15 calls to the agency responsible for the protection of children, the  
16 frail and elderly, and the mentally ill, as well as families in  
17 poverty, the legislature finds it is unacceptable to prevent access by  
18 blockading the public with voice mail, unreturned calls, and long hold  
19 times.

1       The legislature intends that the department staff its primary  
2 public access telephones with a live person option, providing those in  
3 need for whom voice mail options are inappropriate with the opportunity  
4 to speak promptly with a department employee trained to respond to  
5 their questions, or direct their calls.

6       NEW SECTION.   **Sec. 2.** A new section is added to chapter 43.20A RCW  
7 to read as follows:

8       The department shall not be allowed to use an automated telephone  
9 system for answering telephone calls placed to the department's primary  
10 public service phone numbers, during regular hours of operation, unless  
11 the automated telephone system provides, as the first menu option, an  
12 option that permits a caller to speak directly to an employee of the  
13 department, without listening to the entire recorded message. Incoming  
14 telephone calls on primary public service numbers shall be answered  
15 promptly, and the department shall monitor length of time any incoming  
16 call is put on hold, with the goal of reducing hold time to five  
17 minutes or less. No employee of the department may use an automated  
18 phone answering system to screen telephone calls for the purpose of  
19 refusing to communicate with any person if the subject matter of the  
20 telephone message or the identity of the caller relates to a duty or  
21 responsibility of the division or unit of the department for which the  
22 employee performs services, or relates to a duty or responsibility of  
23 the employee. The department of general administration shall ensure  
24 that each division or unit of the department of social and health  
25 services establishes a procedure for answering telephone calls placed  
26 to the department during regular business hours that conforms to the  
27 requirements of this section.

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