

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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: September 25, 2006
CONTACT: Anne Martens, 360-902-0619

Governor Gregoire Reforms WorkFirst to be More Efficient and Effective at Placing Clients in Jobs
Lowest caseload since 1982 due to parents finding jobs

OLYMPIA – Governor Chris Gregoire has implemented several successful WorkFirst reforms to help clients move more quickly from evaluation into work and address the growing gap between strict new federal requirements and a lack of new federal funding.

“Getting parents back to work is good for families and working families are good for Washington,” said Governor Gregoire. “WorkFirst is a success because of our flexibility in designing a program that works for Washington and we will continue to coordinate with families and communities to find better ways to move from welfare to work. Our goal has always been to protect children, minimize bureaucracy and help those who can work, get work.”

The reforms include stronger accountability controls to ensure effectiveness and a comprehensive evaluation of participants to place them at work more quickly.

The welfare caseload in Washington is now the lowest it has been since 1982. Many parents in WorkFirst job search programs are finding employment and staying employed, making it possible for them to leave welfare within 3 months.

Governor Gregoire also criticized the federal government for imposing harsh new regulations, taking away states’ flexibility in designing their welfare programs.

“After years of proven WorkFirst success in Washington, the federal government is stepping in with strict new requirements but not providing any new federal funding,” said Governor Gregoire.

Under new U.S. Department of Health and Human Services regulations the monitoring requirements for states are changed, making it more difficult for all parents to receive cash assistance. The regulations also restrict access to education and job preparation programs by redefining the activities that count as work participation.

Despite the new federal restrictions, Governor Gregoire said that WorkFirst will continue to help families break the cycle of poverty and dependence. There will be maximum time limits on the availability of WorkFirst assistance to parents but the program will take steps to ensure that children are safe and cared for even after a parent reaches the maximum time allowed.

Parents who repeatedly refuse to participate in job search programs will be sanctioned with loss of their WorkFirst grants but only after every effort has been made to place them in work activities.

###