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New Bill Creates a Doorway to Services for Homeless Families and Individuals

Over-the-Phone Access to Resources Allows Counties Flexibility to Help Those in Need

SEATTLE, WA, May 3, 2011—Today, Governor Chris Gregoire signed into law a bill that will help families and individuals experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness quickly connect to the support they need. Building Changes and the Washington Families Fund led the effort in partnership with the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence (WSCADV), Washington State Coalition for the Homeless (WSCH), Committee to End Homelessness in King County (CEH), and the Washington Low Income Housing Alliance (WLIHA).

“We worked hard to with our partners to strike the right balance in getting this bill passed,” said Betsy Lieberman, Executive Director of Building Changes. “Our goal was to eliminate a roadblock while maintaining the safety and privacy of people seeking services, especially those who are survivors of domestic violence.”

The bill, sponsored by Representative Larry Springer (D), passed unanimously in both the House and the Senate. It allows providers, who are working on behalf of vulnerable and homeless families and individuals, to obtain over-the-phone consent to immediately get clients the help they need.

By streamlining how services are accessed, individuals and families no longer have to make numerous trips to different housing and homeless service providers, fill out multiple applications, and then wait—sometimes for weeks—to be helped.

People seeking help can now safely share their information over the phone so that it can be entered into the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). HMIS provides a one-stop access to information and resources for both clients and providers without any cost in time and money.

This bill also supports counties across Washington State in establishing an efficient and reliable system of centralized intake, such as 211, for the homeless to be screened and referred to resources as quickly as possible.

“Centralized intake is a nationally recognized best practice for delivering services to families and individuals experiencing homelessness,” says Troy Christensen, Homeless Services Administrator for Pierce County. “This bill is the first of many steps that will bring changes to our delivery system that quickly move people from crisis to stability.” Building Changes and Pierce County, through the Community Connections Department, are co-funding centralized intake in Pierce, which will benefit from this bill.

“During times of deep budget cuts, we are finding innovative ways to reform state policies and programs in order to continue serving the most vulnerable Washingtonians,” says Representative Larry Springer (D), who sponsored the bill. “This is a small policy change but an important one to help homeless individuals in our state find housing.”

The legislation will go into effect 90 days after the adjournment of the regular session.

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About Building Changes

Building Changes has supported individuals and families throughout Washington State for more than 20 years and has led the Washington Families Fund since its creation in 2004. Building Changes unites public and private partners to create innovative solutions, delivering expert advice, grantmaking and advocacy for lasting change. Building Changes works with housing and service providers and related government entities to serve more than 8,000 homeless individuals annually, including homeless families with children and homeless single adults. For more information, visit: www.buildingchanges.org.

About the Washington Families Fund

The Washington Families Fund was created by the Washington State Legislature in 2004 to ensure that homeless families with children have the supportive services linked to housing they need to move from crisis to stability. To date, the Fund has awarded nearly \$18 million to 48 programs across Washington State dedicated to preventing and ending family homelessness. Public and private partners have contributed \$28 million, and more than 1,286 families including 2448 children and 1,695 adults—have received help.