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February 20, 2006

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

FROM: Christine O, Gregoire, Governor

SUBJECT: **ESTABLISHING A STATE INTERAGENCY COUNCIL ON HOMELESSNESS**

Homelessness is a complicated social problem with many contributing factors that include lack of affordable housing and living-wage employment opportunities, oftentimes family violence, and health-related issues, such as mental illness and substance abuse. While many dedicated individuals, community and faith-based organizations, and government agencies work hard to combat homelessness in our state, this issue, unfortunately, remains a serious concern.

Last year, the Washington State Legislature passed ESSHB 2163 – also known as the Homelessness Housing and Assistance Act – that I signed into law. Among other important activities, the bill requires the state to develop a 10-year homeless housing strategic plan, with annual progress reports to the Legislature, and designated the Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development (CTED) as the lead agency.

The Legislature also envisioned active partnering by six other state agencies: the Departments of Corrections (DOC), Health (DOH), Social and Health Services (DSHS), Veterans Affairs (DVA), the Employment Security Department (ESD), and the Office of Financial Management (OFM). In signing this bill, I asked each of the seven agencies to designate a senior staff person to serve as lead on homelessness issues for their agency. I understand you have designated Blake Chard, Deputy Secretary, in this lead role.

To create an appropriate forum for the cross-agency coordination, collaboration and planning necessary to implement the state's responsibilities under the Homelessness Housing and Assistance Act, I have asked CTED to convene a state Interagency Council on Homelessness. I would like Blake to serve on the Council on behalf of your agency.

Stephen Buxbaum, Assistant Director for Housing at CTED, will be leading the Interagency Council on Homelessness on behalf of his agency and myself. He will be contacting you soon with additional details. If you have any questions at this time, please contact Stephen at (360) 725-2912 or stephenb@cted.wa.gov, or Kari Burrell in my Executive Policy Office at (360) 902-0645 kari.burrell@ofm.wa.gov.

I am aware that developing an effective plan to end homelessness is no small task. Thank you in advance for your hard work and commitment to this very important effort.

cc: Juli Wilkerson, Director, CTED
Stephen Buxbaum, CTED
Blake Chard, DSHS
Tom Fitzsimmons, Chief of Staff, Office of the Governor
Kari Burrell, Executive Policy Advisor, Office of the Governor