



REFORMING HOW WE SERVE VULNERABLE WASHINGTONIANS

Washingtonians are rightfully proud of their long history of care and compassion for the state's vulnerable people. We have steadfastly refused to turn our backs on our children, the poor, the abused and neglected, and the disabled.

These values are reflected in many state services, just one of which is the 70-year General Assistance for the Unemployable program, or GAU. This program provides cash grants and medical benefits to low-income adults without dependents who are temporarily unable to work due to a physical or mental disability that lasts at least 90 days. In any given month, roughly 22,000 people receive benefits under this program. Some still live with the effects of child or other domestic abuse and others struggle with injury, illness or other debilitating problems. For all of them, the GAU program is important.



Yet to protect other critical programs serving vulnerable children, families and seniors, Governor Gregoire recognizes she must reform this safety net for adults without dependents.

The Governor does so in recognition that real progress has been made in redesigning GAU since the 2009 Legislature ordered an overhaul to reduce costs and provide better service. Based on a successful pilot program in King and Pierce counties, the redesign — intended to provide better coordinated medical treatment for GAU recipients — is expected to save the state between \$40 million and \$58 million through June 30, 2011.

But in writing her proposed 2010 Supplemental Budget, Governor Gregoire found that even those changes are not enough to save GAU in its current form and still balance the budget. So her balanced budget — required by law — eliminates the program.

To save the program, the Governor proposes to limit individuals to fewer months of enrollment than now allowed. Beginning Sept. 1, 2010, anyone who has been enrolled in GAU for six months or more would no longer be eligible for the program, and future enrollees would be limited to six months. In addition, the size of the cash grant to recipients would be reduced to \$250 per month.

The reformed program is expected to cost the state approximately \$79 million, including staff costs, which is \$126 million less than it would have cost in its current form. Recent state research shows that six months is enough time for many to transition to more permanent programs funded by the federal government, and others to resume a lifestyle that is self-sufficient. Implementing the six-month maximum period in September will give ample notice to those who are affected by changes.

Governor Gregoire believes that eliminating the GAU program is not consistent with Washington's values, but knows that hard decisions are required in the face of the worst fiscal crisis since the Great Depression.