



KEEPING THE PUBLIC SAFE AND HONORING OUR PUBLIC SAFETY OFFICERS

Of all the responsibilities facing public officials, public safety is at the top of the list. Today's challenge has been to protect citizens from crime and criminals while the costs rise dramatically — and revenues continue to plummet.

Governor Chris Gregoire and the Legislature worked together on a number of measures to keep our families and communities safe. The tragic murders of members of our law enforcement community this past fall reminded us all of the critically important work done by these professionals, and the need to give them the tools they and their colleagues need to protect us.

To this end, a number of measures were passed this session, chief among them the following:

» **Bail requirements.** Governor Gregoire worked closely with legislators from both chambers and both sides of the aisle to reach a bipartisan agreement on a proposed amendment to the state Constitution to give judges discretion to deny bail to a person charged with an offense for which the maximum sentence is the possibility of life in prison. This change will protect our communities and law enforcement officers. The proposal will be on the November ballot. (House Joint Resolution 4220)

» **Involuntary Treatment Act.** Recent events have vividly demonstrated the need to make changes to the state's Involuntary Treatment Act to both protect the public and a person experiencing a mental health crisis. This measure passed the Legislature without a single dissenting vote.

It outlines additional factors, including information provided by credible witnesses, that designated mental health professionals and courts should consider when determining whether a person should be detained under the Involuntary Treatment Act. In addition to other provisions, it requires that whenever a person who is involuntarily committed is discharged from care, notice of the discharge and a copy of any release order must be provided within one business day to the designated mental health professional in both the county where the commitment was initiated and, if different, the county where the individual is expected to reside. Additionally, the Washington State Institute for Public Policy is directed to search for a validated mental health assessment tool or combination of tools for the assessment of persons under the Act. (House Bill 3076)

» **Independent Public Safety Review Panel.** This measure was crafted by the Governor and Legislature to enhance public safety related to persons 'not guilty by reason of insanity.' Legislation was based on recommendations from the Eastern State Hospital Escape Incident Review Task Force and the work of the State Psychiatric Hospital Safety Review Panel, led by King County Prosecutor Dan Satterberg, on supervision of dangerous mentally ill offenders. The law makes several changes, including identifying a validated mental health assessment tool — or a combination of tools — for competency evaluations and 'not guilty by reason of insanity' conditional release risk level assessments. This bill creates an independent Public Safety Review Panel to advise the Department of Social and Health Services and the courts about persons who have been found not guilty by reason of insanity. The department is permitted to make an application to the court for the conditional or final release of a not guilty by reason of insanity patient committed to a state hospital facility in instances where the person has not made such application on his or her own behalf.

And the department is authorized to place a not guilty by reason of insanity patient committed to a state hospital into another secure facility operated by DSHS or by the Department of Corrections if the person presents an unreasonable safety risk not manageable in a state hospital setting. (Senate Bill 6610)

- » **Interstate Committee on Adult Offender Supervision.** In addition to legislation (SB 6548) on the issue, the Department of Corrections has been working to make changes related to greater authority of a receiving state to return parole violators to the sending state. The department is also recommending that the receiving state be sent all information on an offender prior to the offender's arrival. Washington expects the Interstate Compact Committee to take action on Washington's public safety recommendations at its October general membership meeting.
- » **Sex offender address verification program.** To signal her commitment to keeping our neighborhoods safe, the Governor signed into law a program whereby local law enforcement officers verify — in person — the address of each registered sex offender every 12 months for Level I and unclassified offenders; every six months for Level II offenders; and every three months for Level III offenders. This move has been hailed by the law enforcement community and the public. (HB 2534)
- » **Domestic violence protections.** We made important changes to our judicial process to improve our domestic violence prevention efforts. Now under the law, at a defendant's first appearance, the prosecutor must provide the court with the defendant's criminal history and history of no-contact and protection orders. New provisions are created to address when a court may exercise personal jurisdiction over a nonresident when issuing protection orders for domestic violence, sexual assault and harassment. A court may impose an exceptional sentence above the standard range when the offense was part of an ongoing pattern of abuse of a victim or multiple victims. (HB 2777)

In addition to passing bills that protect the public, we also passed important legislation that honors the ultimate sacrifice by members of our law enforcement community. Among these laws are the following:

- » **Jason McKissack Act.** We recognize the imperative to help firefighters and law enforcement officers who are totally disabled in the line of duty with reimbursement for their medical premiums. Named for the Seattle police officer who suffered grievous injuries while serving in the line of duty, the Jason McKissack Act entitles members of Law Enforcement Officers' and Firefighters' Retirement System Plan 2 who become totally disabled in the line of duty to a pension increase to reimburse them for insurance premiums for employer-provided medical insurance, medical insurance under COBRA and Medicare. (HB 1679)
- » **Survivor benefits.** We passed legislation to provide additional survivor benefits for those in dangerous public safety jobs — our law enforcement officers and firefighters. The events of the past year have highlighted the need to support our surviving family members. This law increases the death benefit and indexes it to inflation, improves other survivor benefits, and provides free tuition for surviving spouses and children at our state higher education institutions. These adjustments in death and retirement benefits will help provide peace of mind to our law enforcement officers and firefighters that their families will be taken care of should they be lost in the line of duty. (HB 2519)

While the Governor recognizes that the work of public safety will always be evolving, she is proud of the partnership with the Legislature, law enforcement community, victims' advocacy groups, stakeholders and families to make our communities safe places for us to raise families and earn a living.