

Governor Christine Gregoire
Office of the Governor
PO Box 40002
Olympia, WA 98504-0002

Dear Governor Gregoire,

It has come to my attention that a number of budget reductions are slated to take place early in 2010, possibly as soon as January. These reductions would have a damaging impact on the following programs: Responsible Living Skills, Home Based Services, and Family Preservation. We have also heard that early 2010 budget cuts would reduce funding for family foster care payments, intensive out-of-home care services, and Medicaid treatment child care.

These are very difficult economic times and those of us who provide critical services to children and families know our programs will face the possibility of further state budget cuts during the 2010 legislative session. But, this is not the time to be cutting essential programs for our children without deliberation.

Representing Children's Home Society of Washington, I know that there will be no new state funds to support children – thus, it is even more critical that we continue to maintain programs that will keep our children safe and out of harms way. Once many of these programs are gone, they are almost impossible to bring back. Furthermore, even if we save resources by reducing or eliminating programs, the needs of our children still remain.

As the state's oldest private statewide child and family provider, we are prepared to do what we have to do to make it through this economic crisis. We urge the state to reconsider the timing of these budget reductions to allow legislators and the public the opportunity to discuss them.

Now is not the time for the state to quickly eliminate or reduce essential children's programs. Now is the time for us to come together and discuss ways to increase our efficiency and effectiveness and develop innovative strategies to minimize the impact of cuts on vulnerable children and families.

Two paths lie ahead for our state. One of these leads towards continuing budget cuts to essential children's programs with the hopes that sometime in the near future the current economic crisis will subside. Unfortunately, as programs fall by the wayside, children suffer and, once gone, services will be difficult if not impossible to restore.

The other path continues our support of vital children's programs. As we try to balance our state budget, it requires us to not lose sight of the fact that there is change on the horizon as we implement House Bill 2106. Through this bill, public and private leaders around the state have the opportunity to transform our child welfare system and create communities where families can access efficient and effective support and prevention services. We can build a system that secures a healthy foundation in life for all children, but especially for those who might end up in the child welfare system.

As the 2010 Legislative Session begins, we have the opportunity to work differently and more creatively. In the meantime, please preserve programs for children who really need them. I know how difficult these times are and thank you in advance for your attention to our concerns.

Sincerely,