

High Risk Offender Housing Resolution

Our WC Re-Entry Coalition High Risk Offender Housing Resolution was presented to the Whatcom County Council on **August 7, 2007**. It was approved 6 to 0, with 1 absent.

We also had the support of the Whatcom County Executive Pete Kremen, Whatcom County Sheriffs office, Whatcom County Coalition for the Homeless and Whatcom County Democrats.

Whereas of June 30th, 2007 the Department of Corrections has cut off housing funding assistance for "High Risk" offenders, thereby jeopardizing our communities' public safety.

And whereas, the reasoning for discontinuing this funding was a legal interpretation of financial liability and the passage of ESSB 6157 to take care of future community network re-entry needs.

And whereas, the purpose of this legislation is to improve public safety by better preparing offenders while incarcerated, and continuing those efforts for those recently released from prison or jail, for successful, productive, and healthy transitions to their communities.

And whereas, the Community Trade and Economic Development Department is required to establish a housing assistance program, not to exceed 12 months, for offenders reentering the community who are in need of housing and set up a community transition coordination network grant program which will award grants to counties or groups of counties for implementing coordinated reentry efforts for offenders returning to community from prison or jails.

And whereas, only two pilot counties out of 39 will be provided grants to eligible organizations to provide housing assistance to offenders reentering the community who are in need of housing and that they must be operated in collaboration with a Community Justice Center.

And whereas, Whatcom County does not qualify for a Community Justice Center even though it currently provides over 80% of the services within a one mile radius of its DOC offices.

And whereas, Whatcom County would not qualify for one of the two pilot grants, even though it has successfully, on its own piloted a housing network using the one month rental assistance that was recently abolished to assist about 50 high risk offenders a year.

And whereas, a Whatcom County program designed to safely house sex offenders released from DOC facilities cost \$17,854 for housing assistance for 14 individuals over a 15 month period. Without this program, DOC would have incurred \$322,500 in incarceration costs maintaining offenders until their maximum release date.

And whereas, while only two of the 39 counties will receive grant award, the other 37

counties will receive no assistance and it will take years for all this to be implemented creating a public safety issue throughout the state.

And whereas, ESSB 6157 addresses the issue of liability by exempting landlords, state and local entities who provide housing assistance to offenders from civil damages arising from criminal conduct of an offender solely due to the placement of the offender in housing.

Therefore be it resolved, that the Whatcom County Reentry Coalition requests that Governor Christine Gregoire re-confer with the Secretary of the Department of Corrections and the Attorney General's Office to consider reinstating previous 90 day housing assistance vouchers for "High Risk" offenders.