

# the Courthouse Journal

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*Washington Association of County Officials  
Washington State Association of Counties*

**January 6, 2006  
Issue No. 1**

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Courthouse Journal*

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Be sure to check  
the website for  
**new employment  
opportunities** in  
Clark and Pacific  
Counties!

## 2006 Legislative Session Begins Monday, January 9

The 2006 regular session of the 60<sup>th</sup> Legislature begins on Monday, January 9. The legislative agenda will include action on the Supplemental Budget proposal from Governor Gregoire. With official forecasts now showing projected revenue for the 05-07 biennium to be much higher than expected, Governor Gregoire's supplemental budget proposal shows increased funding in early learning, health care, education, energy assistance including alternative fuels including bio-

diesel, emergency preparedness, catching up on pension unfunded liabilities and Puget Sound clean-up.

Other items that are expected to be before the legislature this session include liability reform, sex offender management and sentencing, methamphetamine proposals, sales tax streamlining, affordable housing, and election issues – all in a 60-day session!

## WSAC Legislative Steering Committee Meets

WSAC's Legislative Steering Committee (LSC), co-chaired by Commissioners Don Munks, Skagit County and Ron Walters, Chelan County, held their first meeting of the year on Thursday, January 5, 2006. Two key actions taken by the LSC dealt with Sales Tax Streamlining and Mental Health:

### Sales Tax Streamlining

- \* Support the State of Washington executing the Streamlined Sales &

### Use Tax Agreement.

- \* Support full mitigation for revenue losses to local jurisdictions without an appropriation.
- \* Fund mitigation in FY 07 for use in FY 08.
- \* Require state to fund monetary allowances.
- \* Require state to reimburse local jurisdictions for seller tax collection errors.

### **SPECIAL NOTICE:**

**The County Treasurers' Association and the County Clerks' Association have each canceled their legislative conferences, in Olympia, January 23-24 and January 25-26, respectively.**

**Want to post a job announcement on our webpage?**

E-mail your info to [bwarden@wacounties.org](mailto:bwarden@wacounties.org)

**What information do you need to include in your e-mail?**

Visit [Employment Opportunities](#)

## The Courthouse Journal

Published weekly (during Legislative Session) and Bi-weekly (other than Session) by the Washington Association of County Officials (WACO) and the Washington State Association of Counties (WSAC).

We welcome your suggestions and contributions. The weekly deadline is noon Wednesday.

Direct inquiries and correspondence to *The Courthouse Journal*, 206 Tenth Av SE, Olympia, WA 98501 or [wacounties.org](mailto:wacounties.org)

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## Mental Health

- Appropriate additional Medicaid funds to at a minimum fund services at the 50th percentile of costs.
- Correct the non-medicaid distribution to its original budget proviso intent.
- Re-examine the methodology for the two funding formulas (Medicaid and non-medicaid) and caseload forecasting of Medicaid eligibles to provide funds sufficient to meet actual costs in each RSN for Medicaid services and meet priority needs as designated by the Legislature for non-medicaid clients and services.

LSC also heard from Attorney General Rob McKenna on his Legislative Agenda including:

- "Operation Allied Against Meth";
- Liability proposal to re-establish the intent that government only be held liable for activities with a comparable private sector counterpart; and
- Child protection legislation dealing with sex offenders.

NOTE: Legislative Committee schedules and agendas can be found at <http://www.leg.wa.gov/wsladm/calendar.cfm>

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## Association News

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### PDC Filing Reminder

The Personal Financial Affairs Statement (PDC Form F-1) is due between January 1 and April 17, 2006. **Who files?** County-wide office holders\* (elected and appointed) who held office during any portion of calendar year 2005, AND County-wide office holders\* who were newly elected in 2005.

\*County-wide office holders include assessor, auditor, clerk, commissioner, council member, coroner, executive, prosecutor,

sheriff, treasurer.

**What period of time does the report cover?** Calendar year 2005 in most cases. County-wide office holders who resigned or were removed from office prior to the end of 2005 may file an F-1 covering just the portion of the year that they held office.

**How do I file?** Electronically, by mail, or personal delivery. Electronic filers have a one-time only requirement of submitting a signature authorization. Once the

PDC receives a filer's signature authorization, the F-1 is filed when the e-filer transmits the report.

Blank forms and detailed instructions can be found under Filer Assistance at [www.pdc.wa.gov](http://www.pdc.wa.gov). Mailed reports are filed as of the postmark date.

#### What if I have questions?

Contact a PDC auditor at: (360) 753-1111, 1-877-601-2828 toll free in Washington State, or [pdc@pdc.wa.gov](mailto:pdc@pdc.wa.gov).

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## Environment, Land Use and Resources

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### Skamania County Receives Radon Outreach Program Award

Congratulations to Skamania County for being among 10 counties throughout the country selected to win 200 free radon test kits through the National Association of Counties' (NACo) new County Radon Outreach Program.

Skamania County, categorized as a Radon Zone 1 Highest Priority by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), submitted a plan for outreach activities to educate their community on the harmful health

effects of radon exposure. They will distribute these test kits throughout the month of January, which is "National Radon Action Month."

NACo says that over 35 counties submitted applications to win these free radon test kits, and although every application was strong with a number of excellent planned outreach and follow-up activities, resources did not allow them to purchase kits for every county in this first year of the program. Clark County also applied. If you would like to discuss opportunities to assist your county in testing homes for

radon please contact Kelly M. Zonderwyk, Community Services Associate and Affiliate Services Coordinator, National Association of Counties at 202.942.4224 or [kzonderwyk@naco.org](mailto:kzonderwyk@naco.org).

Radon is the leading cause of lung cancer among non-smokers and the second leading cause of lung cancer death. According to the EPA, radon is responsible for about 21,000 lung cancer deaths annually and about 2,900 of these deaths occur among people who have never smoked.

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## Courthouse Ramblings

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### From the County Auditor's Association

Klickitat County Auditor **Diana Housden** resigned from office, effective December 31, 2005, due to health problems. Diana has had two surgeries recently and will be released from Legacy Good Samaritan Hospital, in Portland, this week. Recovery will be lengthy, so she will be residing in a nursing

home (yet to be determined) temporarily. We wish her the best, and most of all we hope her health improves infinitely.

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Okanogan County Auditor **Peggy Robbins** is feeling much better, following surgery last month, and will head back to Harborview Hospital, in Seattle, January 17, where determination will be made as

to follow-up treatment. Get well, soon, Peggy.

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Kittitas County Auditor **Jerry Pettit** had surgery at Harborview on January 4. His left foot was repaired after problems have been plaguing him since he broke it over eight years ago.

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## Public Health and Human Services

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### Mental Health Request for Qualifications Awards Announced

DSHS announced the results of the evaluation of the 14 Regional Support Networks' Request for Qualifications (RSNs, RFQ) submittal on January 5, ten days ahead of their deadline. Attached to this Journal is the DSHS press release. Eight RSNs were successful. They are King County RSN, Pierce County RSN, NorthSound Behavioral Health Administration (Snohomish, Whatcom, Island, San Juan and Skagit counties), Timberlands RSN (Wahkiakum, Pacific and Lewis counties), North Central RSN (Grant, Adams and Okanogan counties), Clark County RSN and Greater Columbia Behavioral Health (Yakima, Asotin, Garfield, Columbia, Whitman, Benton, Franklin, Kittitas, Klickitat, Walla Walla, and Skamania counties). The unsuccessful applicants were Chelan-Douglas

RSN, Spokane County RSN, Peninsula RSN (Kitsap, Jefferson, and Clallam counties), Thurston-Mason RSN, Grays Harbor RSN, and NEWRSN (Lincoln, Ferry, Stevens, and Pend Oreille counties).

The unsuccessful RSNs have an opportunity to submit corrective action plans for those areas in which they were found to have a shortcoming in conjunction with the Request for Proposal process that will take place beginning on March 1. At that time, outside entities may also bid to administer public mental health services in those 6 areas of the state.

The specifics of the areas in which the 6 were found to lack adequacy were not available at this printing but are expected to be discussed with each of the 6 during the coming week.

Senator Hargrove's staff has indicated that the Senator will hold a work session on the entire RFQ

process and the process for allowing corrective action where an RSN was found to be inadequate on January 12 from 8 – 10 AM in Senate Hearing Room 1. Representatives from the counties, the Mental Health Division and others have been requested to participate.

The WSAC Legislative Steering Committee met on January 5 and reiterated their support for their RSNs and concern regarding the entire RFQ process especially as it related to the impact on client services. NOTE: *The LSC also adopted a staff recommendation to seek additional Medicaid funding, correct the allocation of nonmedicaid funds to match the budget proviso and outside the legislature work on rational funding formulas for both Medicaid and nonmedicaid funds that cover the full costs of care in Medicaid and meet priority needs in nonmedicaid.*

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## Boards and Commissions

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### State Interoperability Committee Announces Radio Communications Plan

The Washington State Interoperability Executive Committee (SIEC) recently announced the release of its Technical Implementation Plan to help law enforcement, firefighters, emergency medical providers and other first-responders improve their radio communications during emergencies.

The Plan outlines costs and the implementation process, and

identifies critical factors and next steps for state implementation. The initial phases involve state agencies; however, the plan is designed to enable local governments to partner with the state to provide greater levels of radio interoperability statewide. Agencies that use the system will maintain control over their portable and mobile radios, dispatch centers and console equipment.

The full plan is available at <http://isb.wa.gov/committees/siec/index.aspx>. Local officials are

encouraged to review the plan and how it aligns with interoperability projects in the counties. Comments on the plan can be directed to the SIEC staff at the website above, or to Clallam County Commissioner Mike Doherty, who represents WSAC on the SIEC. Commissioner Doherty can be contacted at [mdoherty@co.clallam.wa.us](mailto:mdoherty@co.clallam.wa.us) or 360-417-2238.

# Calendar of Events

<i>Meeting</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Information</i>
<b>For your convenience training and workshops are bolded.</b>			
<b><u>JANUARY 2006</u></b>			
WA State Sheriffs' Assn Breakfast	WA Counties Bldg, Olympia	January 9	(360) 753-7319
<b>Legislative Session Begins</b>	<b>Olympia</b>	<b>January 9</b>	<b><a href="http://www.leg.wa.gov/wsiam/calendar.cfm">http://www.leg.wa.gov/wsiam/calendar.cfm</a></b>
NACo President/Executive	Washington, D.C.	January 10 - 13	
WACO Board of Trustees	WA Counties Bldg, Olympia	January 11-12	(360) 753-7319
Assn of Human Services (ACHS)	AmeriTel Hotel, Olympia	January 18 - 20	(360) 753-1886
WA Counties Insurance Fund/WCIP Board	Radisson Hotel, SeaTac	January 18	(360) 586-0466
WSAC Legislative Steering Committee	WA Counties Bldg, Olympia	January 19/8-11:30	(360) 753-1886
WSAC Legislative Rally Luncheon	Ramada Inn – Governor's House, Olympia	January 19/Noon	(360) 753-1886
WSAC Legislative Rally Reception	Ramada Inn – Governor's House, Olympia	January 19/5:30p	(360) 753-1886
WSAC Board of Directors	WA Counties Bldg, Olympia	January 20/8 - Noon	(360) 753-1886
WA State Assn of County Auditors' Licensing Conference	Comfort Inn, Tumwater	January 23-24	(360) 753-7319
WA State Assn of County Auditors' Legislative Conference	Comfort Inn, Tumwater	January 25-26	(360) 753-7319
WSAC/WACO/AWC Tri Assn	Red Lion, Olympia	January 26	
WA State Assn of County Assessors' Legislative Conference	WA Counties Bldg, Olympia	January 31-February 2	(360) 753-7319
<b><u>FEBRUARY 2006</u></b>			
WSAC Urban County Caucus	Mercato's Ristorante, Olympia	February 1/6:30-9	(360) 753-1886
WSAC Rural Issues Sub-committee	Ramblin' Jack's Restaurant, Olympia	February 1/6:30-9	(360) 753-1886
WSAC Legislative Steering Committee	Red Lion Hotel, Olympia	February 2/9:30-1	(360) 753-1886
WSAC Urban County Caucus	Mercato's Ristorante, Olympia	February 15/6:30-9	(360) 753-1886
WSAC Rural Issues Sub-committee	Ramblin' Jack's Restaurant, Olympia	February 15/6:30-9	(360) 753-1886
WSAC Legislative Steering Committee	WA Counties Bldg, Olympia	February 16/9:30-1	(360) 753-1886
WA Assn of County Auditors' Finance Conference	North Bonneville Hot Springs Resort, North Bonneville	February 28-Mar.2	(360) 753-7319

## ***Calendar of Events (continued)***

<b><i>MARCH 2006</i></b>			
WSAC Urban County Caucus	Mercato's Ristorante, Olympia	March 1/6:30-9	(360) 753-1886
WSAC Rural Issues Sub-committee	Ramblin' Jack's Restaurant, Olympia	March 1/6:30-9	(360) 753-1886
WSAC Legislative Steering Committee	WA Counties Bldg, Olympia	March 2/9:30-1	(360) 753-1886
NACo Legislative Conference	Washington, D.C.	March 4 - 8	<a href="http://www.naco.org">http://www.naco.org</a>
<b>Legislative Session Ends – Sine Die</b>	<b>Olympia</b>	<b>March 9</b>	<b><a href="http://www.leg.wa.gov/wsladm/calendar.cfm">http://www.leg.wa.gov/wsladm/calendar.cfm</a></b>
WCIF/WCIP Board and Insurance Advisory Committee (IAC)	Spokane	March 16	(360) 586-0466
Washington County Administrative Assn - Annual Business	Enzian Inn, Leavenworth	March 22 - 24	(360) 577-3065 Claire Hauge, <a href="mailto:hauec@co.cowlitz.wa.us">hauec@co.cowlitz.wa.us</a>
WA Assn of County Auditors' Recording Conference	Leavenworth	March 27-28	(360) 753-7319

## Notice of RFP for Hearings Examiner for Pierce County

The Pierce County Council is requesting proposals from qualified vendors to provide Hearings Examiner services to Pierce County. The successful proposer will be responsible for adjudicating approximately 300 quasi-judicial cases per year. These cases would contain a variety of complex issues on land use and regulation compliance and enforcement issues. Closing date is January 13, 2006. Call Judy Gasperez, Pierce County Purchasing, at 253-798-7731.

## Sustainable “Communities”

*Editorial from the Wentachee World, December 18, 2005, by Randy Smith, forwarded by Ron Walter, Chelan County Commissioner*

I have to admit it, after living and working for over 50 years on the farm, I am passionate about what it means to me to be in a role of providing food for my fellow citizens, and adding value to our lives here in North Central Washington. For more than a century agriculture has had a special relationship and a positive role in the lives of most residents of NCW. I fear, however, that this relationship is in jeopardy as time moves on.

The changes that have occurred in NCW and the rest of our country in my lifetime have caused me to become very introspective about the farmer's role in life here; and more importantly, just what does it mean to be part of a larger “Sustainable Community”. Today, I would like to explore two different concerns with you and solicit your input on whether or not we can rekindle that relationship that I see so rapidly slipping away. The two concerns are

spray application restrictions and Growth Management...and how, coupled together, they are accelerating the demise of agricultural production in our area.

Over the past seven years nearly 25% of apple farmers have gone out of business in our state. That is more than the previous 25 years combined. In Chelan and Douglas Counties, where farms have historically been the smaller “mom and pop” variety of farms, I imagine the trend is even higher. Today I farm what were twelve different farms...in my lifetime. Why this sudden change? Excess production and in some cases lack of having the right variety at the right time are a couple of answers. But these conditions have happened before and the results were not as dramatic. So what is different now?

One primary difference is the lack of understanding and the subsequent public attitude towards the farming practices we must employ and the decisions we need to make to be productive. This lack of understanding is evidenced by the elevated regulatory mindset of the past several years. I, too, have had my share of challenges with poor markets, poor varieties and poor production. There were a couple of occasions when I was forced to make the management decision to sell off a small portion (on two occasions, less than an acre) of my property to create the cash flow to get through the tough times. That was prior to Growth Management. In the early 1990s Growth Management changed all the rules about how I must survive. If the conditions of the past overtook me today, I would have to sell pieces of orchard in the minimum size of 10 acres, which would rapidly destroy the 60 acres of

orchard that I have spent a lifetime developing. Add to this the newly proposed Department of Agriculture regulation of 48 hour spray notification of certain neighbors within a half mile radius of the orchard and it becomes very difficult to continue to farm in our rapidly urbanizing area.

So what does all this mean? It means that unless we can break the regulatory mindset that we have been in for the past 20 years and create a new vision of how the farm and the urban dweller live and work together, we all may witness a way of life and a huge economic driver of our region quietly fade away. In case you weren't aware, agriculture still is the primary driver of our economy in NCW. The economic analysis done about a decade ago by Washington CEO magazine showed agriculture being responsible for nearly 80% of the economic activity in our region. I respect the fact that there has been diversification of our economy since that time, but my observation is that the diversification is based to a large degree on tourism which relies heavily on our agricultural beauty. So for those of you who think that you aren't part of agriculture (educators, retailers, tourism specialists and professionals of all stripes), I have news for you, we ARE in this together.

If we are to live together and sustain a way of life that most of us cherish, we must find a better way. If many of you feel like I do, that we have much to lose if we don't act, I would love to enter into a dialogue of how we might, together, help create that Sustainable Community for the 21st century. Please let me know: r.smit@verizon.net

## **Washington moves forward to implement a statewide interoperable public safety communications system**

**OLYMPIA, Wash.** -- The tragedy of September 11, 2001, and the recent hurricanes that devastated portions of the southern United States created an urgent need for public safety agencies across the nation to examine how they communicate with each other in times of disaster.

Many police, fire, emergency medical personnel, and other first responders operate different radio communications systems and frequencies that often do not allow them to communicate with each other. This slows their ability to function in all types of situations – whether it's a natural disaster, an accident, or a terrorist attack.

## **State develops technical plan to improve public safety communications**

To address this communications issue, the Washington State Interoperability Executive Committee (SIEC) developed the Technical Implementation Plan (TIP). The TIP is a critical milestone in the effort to improve public safety communications interoperability in Washington state. Interoperability allows public safety personnel to communicate on demand and in real time across jurisdictions and disciplines. The TIP outlines the costs and the implementation process, and identifies the critical factors and next steps the state must take to advance the plan.

## **SIEC selects proposed system to help public safety personnel communicate in real time and on demand**

The SIEC selected a multiple subsystems architecture. This approach is a centrally-managed system of systems and is not

restricted to a single frequency band or technology. It will allow the state to leverage existing radio systems in all the public safety radio bands, and provide a phased migration to a standards-based architecture infrastructure – establishing a fully interoperable radio system. This will also enable local governments to partner with the state to provide greater levels of interoperability.

Pending funding, the SIEC will implement the proposed system over a six-year period, starting with a one-year procurement phase that includes developing detailed technical specifications, and selecting and procuring the system's technical components.

Agencies that use the proposed system will maintain control over their portable and mobile radios, dispatch centers and console equipment.

SIEC members and key stakeholders will continue to provide oversight and planning, and manage the development and enforcement of standards.

## **Significant benefits of the proposed system**

The improvements will provide public safety personnel:

- statewide coverage enhancements for mutual aid.
- signal and voice quality improvements resulting from digital technology.
- system functionality additions for mutual aid and mobile data.
- additional user capabilities.
- interoperability with other state, federal, local and tribal government agencies.

The real value to Washington state includes:

- avoiding potentially redundant costs by implementing shared systems between agencies that can consolidate fixed assets.

- increasing productivity as a result of better coordination between first responders.
- improving public safety by increasing interoperability for all system users with wide area roaming and secure communications for voice and data channels.

## **State estimates proposed system costs**

The estimated system acquisition and recurring costs are as follows:

- The cost to acquire the proposed system will total approximately \$257 million over the six-year implementation period.
- Proposed system recurring operation and maintenance costs will total \$177 million over the next ten years.

The initial costs to implement the proposed system are in addition to the planned expenditures to operate and maintain state agencies' existing systems during the transition period. SIEC members expect to see the costs of the new system decrease over time as existing equipment is replaced.

## **Next steps**

During the next several months, SIEC members will communicate the details of the TIP and the state's effort to advance the plan to stakeholders. You are encouraged to identify how the plan aligns with interoperable communication projects in your community by contacting the staff of the SIEC or your SIEC representative directly. To look up the name and e-mail address of your SIEC representative, visit the SIEC Web site at <http://isb.wa.gov/committees/siec/members.aspx>.

In other activities, Governor Christine Gregoire included \$500,000 for equipment and staff in her supplemental budget proposal released on December 20, 2005. Her

## Attachments (continued)

proposal, if funded by the Washington State Legislature, will deploy interoperable communications equipment to help local public safety providers improve their readiness, cooperation and coordination.

To read the TIP, visit the SIEC Web site at <http://isb.wa.gov/committees/siec/index.aspx>. For more information or questions, contact Dennis Hausman, staff to the SIEC, at 360-902-3463 or via e-mail at [dennish@dis.wa.gov](mailto:dennish@dis.wa.gov).

### **Attorney General Rob McKenna Works With Legislators to Release Child Protection Package**

OLYMPIA – After soliciting recommendations from experts in Attorney General’s Sexually Violent Predator Unit who work with prosecuting attorneys across the state, Attorney General Rob McKenna has asked a bipartisan group of legislators to sponsor seven bills that would improve the state’s ability to protect children and communities from sex offenders.

“People across Washington are rightly concerned about the need to protect our children and communities against sex offenders,” McKenna said. “This package provides law enforcement and prosecutors real tools they need to crack down on sex offenders in our communities—tools they have specifically requested based on their expertise in these cases. This is a meaningful package that will make our communities safer and I appreciate the leadership of the legislators from both parties who’ve joined me in sponsoring this legislation.”

McKenna worked closely with

Sen. Jim Hargrove, D-Hoquiam, chairman of the Senate Human Services and Corrections Committee, to introduce the package.

“As far as I’m concerned, public safety is the number one issue,” Hargrove said. “This package provides a deliberative approach to a very serious issue facing our state today and I look forward to working to see these bills become law.”

The seven bills would:

- Increase penalties for sexually motivated crimes, possession of child pornography, and second degree assault of a child with sexual motivation;
- Strengthen the sex offender registration statute;
- Continue to restrict sex offenders from living within 880 feet of a public or private school statewide;
- Extend the statute of limitations in DNA cases; and
- Require sex offenders to admit guilt before becoming eligible for special sentencing alternatives.

“Protecting children and communities against sex offenders is vitally important,” said Sen. Stephen Johnson, R-Kent, who will join Hargrove in sponsoring the bills in the Senate. “As ranking Republican on the Senate Judiciary Committee and an attorney by trade, I believe these bills provide responsible criminal justice solutions to disturbing problems in our state.”

Rep. Al O’Brien, D-Mountlake Terrace, chairman of the House Criminal Justice and Corrections Committee and a 29-year veteran of the Seattle Police Department, will sponsor the package in the House of Representatives along with Reps. Jim Clements, R-Selah, and Jay Rodne, R-Snoqualmie.

“When I saw the horrendous

damage done by Joseph Duncan to the Groene family in Idaho, I made it my purpose this session to pass tougher laws on sex offenders in our state,” O’Brien said. “The safety of our children and families is paramount and I’m working to get the Legislature to come together in a bipartisan manner to pass a meaningful package of sex offender legislation this session.”

“We need to put children and the community first when it comes to cracking down on sex offenders,” Rodne said. “As a father and as an attorney, I believe these bills strike a good balance between the desire to keep our children safe from all harm and the need to provide reasonable legislative solutions.”

Clements, who co-chaired the Joint Task Force on Sex Offender Management, and sponsored the community protection law in the 2005 session, said he was particularly pleased with the bill to continue the protection zones and make them consistent statewide.

“I’ve not strayed from my original goal. I’ve always felt we have to guard our children against these people,” Clements said. “Parents must continue to remain vigilant when it comes to their children’s whereabouts but at the very least they can be assured that we’re working to guard against sex offenders living next door to their schools.”

McKenna remains committed to continuing to work with legislators to develop solutions for other areas where sex offenders may have access to children.

“I’m still very concerned about sex predators who frequent community centers, swimming pools and other public areas where

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## Attachments (continued)

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children congregate," McKenna said. "We need to provide the managers of these facilities some tools to prevent known offenders from coming into contact with the children who are there. I've been assured by legislators we will continue to work to come to agreement on a solution in this area."

He is also working with legislators on the issue of minimum sentences for sex offenses against children, taking into consideration the fact that Washington law already allows courts to impose life sentences on the most violent offenders.

-Join Attorney General Rob McKenna's Listserv for the latest news from the AG's office or visit our Web site at [www.atg.wa.gov](http://www.atg.wa.gov)

### **Upgrading" community mental health services**

*Improved accountability, effectiveness, and opportunities for stakeholder involvement*

In 2005, the Washington State Legislature passed E2SHB 1290, landmark legislation that instructed the Department of Social and Health Services to begin an upgrade in the way the state will fund and supervise community mental health services. The legislation requires expanded opportunity for consumers, families and advocates to influence the way mental health services are handled, and upgrades the accountability for how state taxpayers' dollars are spent.

The effort began upon passage of E2SHB 1290 with the development of standards for the Regional Support Networks (RSNs). The RSNs administer community-level mental health treatment by subcontracting with local providers and provider

groups. A Request for Qualifications (RFQ) was distributed to the state's 14 RSNs in advance of the current state contract's expiration in August 2006.

The standards included in the RFQ stem from requirements of E2SHB 1290 and the Balanced Budget Act of 1997 (BBA). These standards require RSNs to perform administrative functions that are typical for behavioral health managed care organizations. RSNs are required to demonstrate how they will be accountable for the delivery of effective and efficient services in order to sign new contracts in September 2006.

All 14 RSNs submitted responses to the RFQ by the December 1, 2005, deadline. Eight of the 14 RSNs were determined by independent evaluation teams to be substantially compliant with requirements in the RQ. DSHS intends to renew contracts with these RSNs in September 2006. A Request For Proposals (RFP) covering those areas in which an existing RSN was not substantially compliant will be issued in March 2006, and any RSN that did not meet those requirements will have the opportunity to submit proposals as part of the new bidding process. The RFP will also be open to other kinds of organizations that may be interested in the contracts.

The decision to upgrade Washington's mental health standards and delivery system followed a year-long review of mental health services and funding levels by a joint legislative-executive task force. A key issue under review was how and whether the state could replace about \$80 million in Medicaid dollars that would no longer be available for mental health

care in the current biennium. In its final report, the task force concluded that those services were critical to community mental health programs. The task force recommended -and the Legislature ratified -the appropriation of state-only dollars to replace the lost federal funds. Many of the task force recommendations were incorporated into two mental health reform bills passed last session, E2SHB 1290 and E2SSB 5763. Other highlights of these bills related to mental health improvements include:

- Expedited Medicaid eligibility processes for individuals with mental disorders transitioning from institutions
- Pilot projects for integrating mental health and chemical dependency crisis response including new secure detoxification facilities Integrated screening and assessment for mental health and chemical dependency issues

### **Washington receives federal Mental Health Transformation Grant**

Washington is one of seven states to win a Mental Health Transformation Grant from the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The grants, which will total between \$2 million and \$3 million per year for each state over the next five years, will enable a comprehensive review of mental health services at every level of government and encompass all state and local programs -public health, law enforcement and corrections, employment security, education and social services -that are involved with mental health.