



STATE OF WASHINGTON

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TO: All Agency Directors

FROM: Christine O. Gregoire
Governor

SUBJECT: Washington Public Disclosure Act

I am writing about a subject that is very important to this administration and the people of Washington. Voters passed our Public Disclosure Act as an Initiative in 1972. The purpose of this memorandum is to emphasize my expectation that this administration will live up to the spirit of this very important law.

We all share the goal of increasing the credibility of state government. The Public Disclosure Act is a vital tool in helping us achieve that goal. The concept behind the Public Disclosure Act is simple. An informed public is essential to our form of government. The public must retain control of government and the only way it can do that is to be informed about what government is doing.

Here is how drafters of the Public Disclosure Act put it: "The people of this state do not yield their sovereignty to the agencies that serve them. The people, in delegating authority, do not give their public servants the right to decide what is good for the people to know and what is not good for them to know. The people insist on remaining informed so that they may maintain control over the instruments that they have created."

Others point out that the more informed people are, the better they will be governed and that government performs best when it is open and accountable.

The Public Disclosure Act is one of the primary ways the public keeps informed about government. I therefore direct all agencies to renew their commitment to openness, to the underlying principles of the act, and to its effective implementation. Each agency must take a fresh look at its implementation of Chapter 42.17 RCW, reduce any backlog on disclosure requests, and foster an appreciation of the importance of public disclosure among its employees. It is the expectation of this administration that we will look for

ways to comply with the letter and spirit of the Public Disclosure Act rather than look for ways to withhold disclosure.

Our goal should be to establish a public confidence that each individual has the ability to access the records needed to help him or her understand state government's decisions and how they are made. To do that, we must be committed to openness and practice it on a daily basis by enhancing public access and ensuring records are released in a timely, respectful way.

There is no question that release of some records can be time consuming, difficult, and sometimes even embarrassing. But we must always remember we are accountable to the people and that means we have to operate with an openness that allows them to have input on what we do, understand our decision making, and ultimately sit in judgment of our work. We must all work to build full public confidence that state government is open and accountable.