



STATE OF WASHINGTON  
WASHINGTON STATE BOARD OF HEALTH

PO Box 47990 • Olympia, Washington 98504-7990

January 24, 2006

The Honorable Karen Keiser  
Senate Health & Long-Term Care Committee Chair  
Washington State Senate  
338 John A. Cherberg Building  
Post Office Box 40433  
Olympia, Washington 98504-0433

Dear Senator Keiser:

I am writing as chair of the Washington State Board of Health to support the concept of Senate Bill 6363, which your committee is scheduled to hear tomorrow. This bill would require health promotion programs for employees, including an on-line health assessment tool, an insurance product for state employees that rewards healthy behaviors, and a grant program to help small businesses develop employee health programs. The Board clearly recognizes the dramatic need to increase physical activity, improve nutrition, encourage better management of chronic conditions, and reduce the use of tobacco, alcohol and other drugs. Programs targeted to employees appear to be a cost-effective way to work toward these goals.

As a public health agency, our primary goal is to improve the health of the population. For that reason alone we would support the intent of this legislation. But we also believe this bill could improve the productivity of state employees and reduce the rate of inflation for state-purchased employee health insurance. Escalating health care costs make it difficult for the state to maintain or expand programs that increase access the uninsured and the underinsured.

I understand that the Health Care Authority is developing an on-line health assessment tool and that the Department of Health has a small grant program that uses federal funds to help small business with employee wellness. An interagency team has been developing an employee home promotion program for state agencies and may asked the Governor to put forward some decision packages related to this work for the 2007-09 biennium. For this reason, I can speak only to the value of the policy intent behind SB 6363, not to matters of timing or funding.

Thank you for your interest in this important public health issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "K. Marie Thorburn, MD, MPH".

Kim Marie Thorburn, MD, MPH  
Chair, Washington State Board of Health

cc: Senate Health & Long-Term Care Committee Members  
Washington State Board of Health Members  
Ms. Christina Hulet, Governor's Executive Policy Office  
Mr. Brian Peyton, Department of Health