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## Rell overhauls award process on state contracts

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**HARTFORD** - Gov. M. Jodi Rell announced Wednesday she has signed a bill overhauling the way in which state contracts are awarded. Among other things, she has created a contracting standards board to oversee the process and make it more transparent.

"Our citizens should be confident that state contracts are being awarded through a process that is open, honest and fair," Rell said. "Government must conduct its operations with the highest standards of integrity."

The bill establishes a 14-member board, with eight members appointed by the governor and six appointed by the legislature. The board will hire a chief procurement officer to train all agency personnel and ensure uniform contract procurement practices throughout state government, Rell said.

Among other duties, the board will oversee a cost-benefit analysis of each state contract to determine whether it is in the state's best financial interest to use private sector consultants on public projects. In most cases, the board will not approve a privatization contract unless it would result in at least a 10 percent cost savings, Rell said.

Taxpayers likely would be surprised to know that the state has not performed such cost analyses in the past, said Matt O'Connor,

communications director for the State Employees Association Service Employees International Union Local 2001. The Hartford based group represents 25,000 public sector workers statewide and supports the measure.

"We're really pleased that we finally have legislation," he said.

A cost-benefit analysis is essential whenever a contract is considered for privatization because it is not always cheaper to hire a private consultant to do the work, he said.

Under the bill, core governmental functions may not be privatized. Those include such work as bridge inspections, construction projects at state universities and information technology projects where private personal information is involved.

The contracting standards board will audit state agencies regularly to ensure they comply with policies.

The board also will have the authority to recommend terminating or disqualifying contractors when there is cause to do so, which O'Connor commended.

Overall, the bill creates some "common-sense standards" that will improve the contract awarding process, O'Connor said. Until now, "Connecticut has lagged in this area."

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