MO Budget Includes New Cost Cap for Some Home Care Resulting in Cuts of Attendant Hours

CARL JUNCTION, MISSOURI -

The Missouri budget plan from Governor Eric Greitens includes some bad news for some disabled and senior citizens getting home health care. It's not just a funding cut for home care this time, but a new limit on the number of care hours that qualify for reimbursement.

Angela York in Carl Junction, understands the problem. She works on physical therapy stretches with 23-year old Shanda who has spina bifida and hydrocephalus. Angela is a home health care aid with numerous clients including Shanda her daughter. Angela gets paid for her work as Shanda's attendant, but under the Missouri budget plan the number of hours that qualify will be cut. Shanda sometimes requires five hours of help a day with everything from laundry to cooking. Shanda explained, "I mean some things I won't be able to do on my own. Like carrying pots and pans from the stove to wherever it needs to go cause I fall so much. I fall every day and end up hurting myself. There are days that I fall and I literally cannot get up on my own."

Independent Living Center officials say consumer directed services means clients pick their own home care attendant which can be a relative but not a spouse. Right now CDS home care is funded just like nursing homes at up to thirty-one dollars a month. A cut to sixty percent funding level means a loss of more than twelve hundred a month for Angela in hours paid. And she'll face other costs.
Angela explained, "She'll (Shanda) still be a priority, that's my baby. But it still puts you in a bind. When I go on other jobs, I pay somebody to come in and help with her. So, that does affect me."

The new sixty percent cost cap impacts about eighty clients at the Independent Living Center. Officials say they now have to make difficult choices.

Ali O’Dell the center’s Outreach Director said, "They're gonna have to choose. Do I want you to cook me dinner or do my laundry? That's crazy! Dinner or clean clothes. Having to choose is just ridiculous!"

Local state representatives aren't happy with the budget cuts for seniors and the disabled.

Rep. Bill White of Joplin said, "I was told when I argued on the floor there was absolutely no money anywhere for these programs. And the next day, very next day on the floor they announced the education budget and lo and behold we have enough money to fully fund education formula which was forty million dollars."

The work can be simple tasks like laundry and doing dishes but it's crucial for someone losing the help.

Angela said of her clients, “They can’t do it. Some of them will be put in nursing homes for it.”

And Shanda worried, “It would be taking away what little independence I have.”

Some lawmakers hope Governor Greitens signs house committee bill three that would put thirty-five million dollars into a senior protection fund. It would ease cuts to agencies such as the Independent Living Center from three percent to one and a half percent.

But the percentage change on hours for attendant care would not change, unless the issue is addressed by next year's legislature. The cuts came in Governor Greitens’ budget balancing plan.