



# "It Should not be Debatable": Springfield Citizens and Leaders Oppose State Budget Proposal

By [KATHRYN EUTSLER \(/PEOPLE/KATHRYN-EUTSLER\)](#) · APR 13, 2015



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*Crystal Brigman Mahaney, Statewide Grassroots Organizer for Missouri Health Care for All, led a discussion Monday regarding local opposition to the proposed budget.*

KATHRYN EUTSLER/KSMU

A group of Springfield citizens and business leaders are protesting proposed cuts (<http://ksmu.org/post/missouri-senate-passes-261-billion-state-budget>) by the Missouri Senate to the 2016 state budget. Their plan would lump most of the funding for the departments of Health and Senior Services, Social Services, and Mental Health, together and reduce could services for the elderly, disabled, and children in need of welfare.

The Missouri Budget Project (<http://www.mobudget.org/senate-cuts-harmful-to-vulnerable-missourians/>) says the Senate budget cuts more than \$183 million from those departments compared to the House-approved budget.

“Most of my life is still in my control,” Watson explains.

74-year-old Marty Watson, who receives in-home care for numerous health problems, says the cuts could be life changing.

She says if the reductions lead to a major cut in Medicaid, she would no longer be able to enjoy her independence.

“I would be in the position of having to sell my house and move to assisted living, single home, or something. I would not be safe to stay in my house.”

Shelby Butler, the access coordinator for the Southwest Center for Independent Living, says providing for Watson’s current freedom is the organization’s mission.

“Any disruption or interruption of these services could put individuals at risk and put the programs in a negative downward spiral,” Butler says.

She says the cuts will not only hurt those receiving in-home care, like Watson, but will actually just require more state funds.

“We urge the conference committee and legislature to keep vulnerable individuals in mind when discussing the budget, and cutting funds that provide these necessary services which save the individual from losing their independence and save the state money from costly nursing facilities.”

In addition to affecting the elderly, the proposed budget would reduce disability assistance funds by \$12 million.

That’s according to Mike Powers, the CEO of Arc of the Ozarks. His organization provides employment, housing, and other necessary services to over 1,000 people in southwest Missouri. He says that \$12 million goes farther than you may think.

“When you cut one dollar out of these funds, you’re actually cutting 3. So that 12 million is more like 30 million,” Powers says.

The reduced budget proposal, he says, will force the Arc to cut programs like therapy, home care, and employment training.

“Services for individuals with disabilities are already significantly underfunded. The impact of this cut and the magnitude of it would be very severe.”

Jan Jones, the Executive Director of Abilities First, says the negative effects of the proposed budget cut do not stop there. She says she is worried about the proposed organizational structure.

“This lumped sum funding is not something that Missouri has ever done before. It eliminates a lot of the transparency that we currently have in state government. When individual things are shown in the budget under a line item, as citizens we know what those funds are being used to do. When it’s a lumped fund, we no longer have that ability to see ‘what is that being used for?’” Jones says.

Since it is such a new system, Jones says there's also no way to predict what other changes or bad results may occur.

A third area affected by the proposed budget cut is child welfare.

Kris Barefield, a family law and child abuse and neglect attorney, says the proposed budget could reduce the availability of services like counseling, therapy, and help for 17-year-olds about to age out of the foster system. He says there is no question that the budget cuts should not happen.

"Providing the highest level of social services for the innocent and most vulnerable members of our community should not be debatable," Barefield says.

Marty Watson agrees. She says that while she does have health problems, she currently feels in control of her life.

Losing her in-home care because of the state budget cuts, however, would make her feel as though the control was ripped out of her hands, she says.

"The worse part of it is not only knowing that you might lose what you have, but also the sense of helplessness, and the independence and the pride that that takes away."

Lawmakers from both the House and Senate are set to begin this week attempting to work out differences between the budget proposals from each.

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