



Leaders Speak Out Against Social Service Budget Cuts

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Published 04/13 2015 06:07PM Updated 04/13 2015 06:21PM Springfield, Mo. -- As the last few weeks of the legislative session wrap up, state lawmakers are once again faced with tough decisions when it comes to balancing the budget. However, a budget decision made last week by the state's senate caught many social service providers and those they help, off guard.

During a press conference on Monday, those with local service providers, nonprofits and the faith community urged state lawmakers to rethink reducing funding in the 2016 state budget for the departments of health, mental health and senior services.

"It may be a risk to you but please do the right thing," said Rev. Andy Bryan with Campbell United Methodist Church.

"We need the legislature to protect Missourians with disabilities," said Shelby Butler with Arc of the Ozarks.

"There are serious negative repercussions," said Jan Jones with Abilities First.

The house version of House Bills 10 & 11 allocates roughly \$2.67 million dollars for all the departments while the currently approved senate version allocates about \$183,000 less, or \$2.48 million dollars total; with an overall \$23 million dollar reduction in all of the department's general operating budgets from last year.

"We reject the false choice that we can only help seniors or children. That we can only help people with mental illness or people with disabilities," said Crystal Brigman Mahaney with Missouri Health Care for All

Some services that could be impacted include: child care for low-income families, services for abused and neglected children, Medicaid, state psychiatric hospitals, and home-based services for seniors and the disabled.

"It's scary," said Marti Watson who receives social services from the state and local agencies. Watson, who is both blind and diabetic said she fears the loss in funding could cause her to lose her home.

"Most of my life is still in control," Watson said "These constant introductions of cuts and changes makes you feel totally out of control."

The bill's sponsor Senator Kurt Schaefer of Columbia said the cuts would slow the growth of the three department's budgets, which he says have not been spending all the money allotted to them.

"They have a lot of money that they have built into these lines that they just don't need," Schaefer said.

"They're not going to tell us where to find it. It just doesn't work that way."

Governor Jay Nixon said the “draconian” cuts are unnecessary due to an additional \$80 million dollars in state revenue, as well as the built-in state surplus that could be used to fund the departments.

"The point here is that we have more resources, and so draconian cuts to legally mandated services are not necessary," Nixon said.

Members with both the house and the senate are in conference committees this week to try and work out the differences between their budgets. After that it would be up to Governor Nixon to either approve or veto the bills.

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