



## People at Alabama State House rally against cuts in 'essential services' for disabled people

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Mental Health Commissioner Zelia Baugh, left, speaks on the statehouse steps in Montgomery, Ala. during a rally on Alabama Disabilities Advocacy Day Thursday March 8, 2012. At right is Chris Tidwell, of Tuscaloosa, Ala. (AP Photo/Montgomery Advertiser, Mickey Welsh)

MONTGOMERY, Alabama -- A crowd of more than 150 people rallied outside the Alabama State House today to ask legislators to "save our services" and not slash state funding for essential services for people who are mentally ill, deaf, blind wheelchair-bound or have other disabilities.

"We know that we're going to have some cuts. We want to make sure our essential services are not cut," said one of the rally speakers, Chris Tidwell of Tuscaloosa, vice president of the non-profit Alabama Disability Advocacy Network.

"We want to make sure that our people are able to have adequate housing, adequate transportation, adequate education and health care. If those things are cut, a lot of these people are not going to be able to get out and work," said Tidwell, an employee of the Social Security

Administration.

State General Fund revenues in the 2013 fiscal year, which starts Oct. 1, are forecast to fall \$367 million, 22 percent, according to the Legislative Fiscal Office, mainly because more than \$300 million in windfalls supporting the General Fund this year will be gone.

The General Fund is a major source of state money for state agencies over mental health, public health, human resources, Medicaid and other services.

"Our constitution requires that our state operate on a balanced budget, so some hard decisions are going to have to be made," said another rally speaker, Graham Sisson, president of the advocacy network and executive director of the Governor's Office on Disabilities.

"Agencies will have a limited amount of money," Sisson said. "We need to help the agencies come up with creative solutions to continue to meet the needs of people with disabilities, no matter what money is available."

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