

ALABAMA EXPOSURE: DHR cuts may cause federal grants to be lost

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Legislative budget leaders asked state General Fund agency heads to respond to potential budget cuts of up to 25 percent. So when Department of Human Resources Commissioner Nancy Buckner told a joint legislative budget hearing that a 25 percent cut would eliminate temporary financial assistance to the poor and child support collection efforts, House Ways and Means General Fund Committee Chairman Jim Barton, R-Mobile, said he was skeptical.

Barton said he believes Buckner's budget has a "lot of fat" in it, and he would consider cutting more than 25 percent of the DHR's budget, the Montgomery Advertiser reported.

"I don't have any money," Buckner said.

Gov. Robert Bentley proposed a 2012-13 budget with a \$4 million cut to DHR. Buckner said that in her worst-case scenario — if her budget had to be cut \$22 million — it would result in the loss of \$93.3 million in federal funds.

She said an additional \$48 million would be cut from the Child Support Enforcement Program.

DHR spokesman Barry Spear said DHR collected \$315 million in delinquent child support last year, the Associated Press reported.

Cut may cause thousands to lose mental health care

At that same budget hearing, Mental Health Commissioner Zelia Baugh delivered her worst-case scenario if she's hit with a 25 percent budget cut next fiscal year.

A cut of that magnitude would result in 20,641 people losing community mental illness services, she said. And another 359 people with intellectual disabilities would lose community residential services under the Medicaid waiver program.

The losses would be the result of a cut in state funds that are used to match federal Medicaid dollars.

She said the impact on communities would result in a 52 percent patient increase in state psychiatric hospitals and the reopening of a state-run developmental center to serve the 359 people who would lose local services.

Baugh said she would have to hire 2,150 people to handle the expensive changes. She said a budget cut of 25 percent would prevent her from using available state dollars to get Medicaid match funds for community treatment and would require the continued operation of state facilities.

Baugh proposes to close four of six mental illness hospitals and shift patients to community care where Medicaid will pick up part of the tab.

Board-certified teachers may get more pay

National Board of Professional Teaching Standards certified teachers in Alabama may start getting some pay for their efforts.

The Senate last week 29-0 approved a bill by Sen. Jabo Waggoner, R-Vestavia Hills, to appropriate \$2.3 million to pay teachers who passed board certification in 2011 and 2012 the full \$5,000 annual salary supplement. The legislation requires retroactive payment to teachers who were not fully paid.

“We want to honor our commitment to educators, and reward those teachers that have worked to better themselves professionally,” Waggoner said.

Because of budget constraints, teachers who make board certification have not been fully paid for two years. The \$2.3 million will go to the will go to the 1,848 National Board certified teachers in Alabama, Waggoner said.

Fourth legislative week

The Legislature returns for the fourth week of its 2012 regular session on Tuesday. The House is to reconvene at 1 p.m. and the Senate at 2 p.m. The session can last no later than May 21.

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