

Dear Editor,

Illinois legislators must PRESERVE funding for critical services to vulnerable children, teens, families and seniors in the FY 2015 State budget. Without a revenue solution many of the effective interventions provided by The Center for Youth and Family Solutions and other social service agencies will face an inconceivable 25% cut. These proposed cuts come on the heels of years of eroding funding and increased needs in the families that we serve. Some of the eliminated services include:

- Sharp cuts in the Comprehensive Community Based Youth Services program that effectively reduces juvenile delinquency and keeps youth out of jail. The cuts would include follow up with the youth and their family which prevents youth from coming back through the system time and time again. *Keeping just one youth out of juvenile prison saves Illinois taxpayers \$100,000.*
- Individual Care Grants would be reduced by 25% and nearly 750 mentally ill children would be forced into the DCFS or DJJ care.
- Residential treatment programs for kids would be forced to reduce or eliminate services geared to transition children to less restrictive placements. We will have to reduce the costs for therapeutic and case management services that are vital to minimizing length of stay in high end care.
- Community Area Projects led by local community residents which effectively reduce juvenile crime would be cut.
- Effective in-home senior counseling programs that successfully prevent or delay higher end care would be reduced. One year of nursing home care costs \$60,000.
- DCFS cuts include eliminating services to youth over 18. This includes transitional programs that prepare youth to live independently, go to college, or start a job. The costs to our state if these youth enter their adult life unprepared to be contributing citizens is staggering.
- Proposed cuts to child welfare casework staff will mean foster children will remain in care for longer periods of time – these kids, already traumatized by abuse and neglect, deserve to move toward living with permanent families as quickly as possible. We do not want to return to the days of the 1990's with a foster care system that has 50,000 children. Out of home placements are expensive for our state.
- There will be cuts to the mental health and support services that help abused and neglected children cope with the traumas they've suffered. Those services frequently help children heal, and move out of costly long-term care and into permanent families.
- DCFS has indicated they would have to cut services to the siblings of children in care who are not wards. This will put children at risk of abuse and neglect and result in more children entering foster care.
- We will be also be unable to continue our work towards licensing relative caregivers, which will also decrease significant federal dollars to the state.

As you can see, the cuts would be devastating to all levels of our service population. I must remind everyone that private child welfare agencies in Illinois have only received one 3% CODB increase since 2000 while the CPI has increased 29.7% during that same time. Mental Health services have already been cut over \$113 million dollars in Illinois since 2009. The National Institute for Mental Health (NIMH) calls such cuts in Illinois “staggering” and asserts “cuts of this magnitude will disrupt services, causing escalated visits to emergency rooms, hospitalizations, homelessness, entanglement with juvenile and criminal justice systems, the loss of critical developmental years, premature deaths and suicides.”

The system is in crisis and the safety net is at extreme risk. We need the legislature to support the governor’s budget before the end of the fiscal year so that we can continue to support the clients in critical need in the communities we serve. Further cuts will devastate our communities and the fiscal and human costs will be catastrophic.

Sincerely,

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