

EARLY EDUCATION

Advocates, kids fight for aid

Programs for poor face cuts under state budget

Friday, May 15, 2009 3:07 AM

BY CATHERINE CANDISKY

THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

If state leaders want to improve Ohio's education system, they shouldn't be slashing \$244 million in state aid to early-care and education programs for low-income youngsters, advocates say.

More than 130,000 children would lose access to preschool, mental-health services and wellness programs under a budget proposal passed by the House and under review in the Senate.

Katie Kelly, director of Groundwork, a statewide coalition of early-care advocates, said the cuts will mean that fewer at-risk children are prepared to start school and will lead to higher costs for the state down the road.

"The question is do we pay it now for an early-childhood system that we know can change the trajectory of these children's lives, or do we pay it when these children repeat third grade drop out of high school have babies when they are teenagers and look to our public assistance system for support have costly mental-health treatment as adults for conditions that could have been treated when they were toddlers; or, worst of all, do we pay to support these children in our jails?" Kelly testified yesterday before the Senate Finance Committee.

Earlier yesterday on the West Side, 4-year-old preschoolers at Creative Child Care marched with their teachers to protest planned cuts to Ohio's Early Learning Initiative. The budget plan would cut funding for a third of students -- 6,400 youngsters -- in the Early Learning Initiative and public preschool programs.

The proposal also would reduce state aid to Help Me Grow, which provides services to expectant parents, newborns, infants and toddlers at risk for developmental delays or disabilities; and mental-



CHRIS RUSSELL | DISPATCH

Four-year-olds Leylany Ramirez, left, and Lori Jefferson protest proposed state cuts to their school, Creative Child Care, on the West Side. The school helps low-income preschoolers prepare to enter kindergarten.

health consultation and treatment services. It also would cut the rates to providers of subsidized child care.

Early-childhood advocates and other human-services supporters are urging the governor and legislative leaders to consider a tax increase to prevent cuts in essential services.

"These children are as frail and needy as the elderly," said Margaret Hulbert of United Way of Greater Cincinnati, referring to Democratic House leaders restoring cuts to nursing homes proposed by Gov. Ted Strickland.

"Why are children not as important?"

ccandisky@dispatch.com

Ads by Yahoo!

Powerful Dispatch & Incident Control

CAD system for dispatch & incident control for multiple jurisdictions.

(www.tiburoninc.com)

Ohio DUI Lawyers

Fight Your Ohio DUI. Speak W/ A I Local DUI Lawyer. Free Evaluation.

(www.TotalDUI.com)

Homes for Sale Columbus Ohio

Whether you must sell a house or looking to buy, rent or lease-option a house in Columbus, Ohio, our goal is to educate you. So, you could make the right home decision for yourself.

(www.whynotyours.com)

©2009, The Columbus Dispatch, Reproduction prohibited