

Ten Help Me Grow jobs saved

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LIMA — The 10 employees of the Help Me Grow program whose layoffs were to be effective this week will remain on the job.

Esther Baldrige, superintendent of the Allen County Board of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, rescinded the layoffs Wednesday after learning the board would receive more state money than expected. Nine of the 10 will remain as full-time workers. One clerical employee's position will be reduced to part-time, Baldrige said.

The Help Me Grow program employs 12 people and enrolls more than 400 disabled and at-risk children ages birth to 3. The layoffs would have eliminated services for the 300 or so at-risk children.

State funding for MRDD programs has been greatly reduced and will continue to falter, but millions in federal stimulus funding has at least temporarily propped up the organizations.

John L. Martin, director of the Ohio Department of MRDD, said about \$150 million is marked for the state's MRDD program during the next two years, mostly making up for what the boards have lost in other funding. That will give county boards time to learn to operate more efficiently and avoid hurting those they serve.

"To make severe changes on a dime, immediate dramatic cuts are very, very, difficult," Martin said. "So by having two years to plan we can make them at a reasonable rate so nobody gets hurt."

Martin spoke to the Auglaize County Board of MRDD Wednesday in New Bremen, giving an update of the biennial budget.

Al Willis, superintendent of the Auglaize County Board of MRDD, said services there would not be reduced, though they would continue working to become as efficient as possible in preparation for when the stimulus funding dries up.

"When we hit that wall, there's going to be a door in there for Auglaize County, we'll go through it and we'll survive," Willis said.

Auglaize County's board has been working for about four years to reduce administrative costs.

"We ramped them up over the last two years and worked with our union association here to make some of these changes, so fiscally, we're in strong shape," he said.

Baldrige said her board has carefully filled open positions and is keeping track of both the actual financials and what the financials would be without the extra stimulus money.

"Over the past year we've brought down our costs quite a bit," she said.

Auglaize County's board serves 235 people. Allen County's serves about 800.