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Ohio budget cuts hurt Cuyahoga County child-care program, Passport for the elderly

Posted by [Aaron Marshall](#) August 03, 2009 07:00AM

COLUMBUS -- Officials in the Cuyahoga County Children and Family Services Department have a \$1.2 million headache because the new state budget chops monthly payments to about 5,000 local adoptive families of foster children.

The slicing of the statewide subsidy from \$300 a month to \$235 for parents who adopt foster children is causing problems for county officials who have signed long-term contracts with the foster parents, agreeing to provide a certain level of support. In Cuyahoga County alone, officials would need to shell out \$1.2 million a year to make up the difference in lost state funding.

"We don't have the money, and this is not our doing," said Deborah Forkas, head of the county agency. "Unfortunately, we feel like this is the state's obligation, and they need to do the right thing."

Complicating the picture: All 5,000 parents are entitled to a full hearing on the funding change under Ohio law, according to Forkas.

That curveball is one of many that the pared-down \$50.5 billion state budget has thrown at local service providers, who are scrambling to make changes. Programs for everyone from young children to seniors seeking care are feeling the budget pinch.

Child-care providers must discontinue Early Learning Initiative programs that were eliminated in the budget, and those who care for the elderly must freeze enrollment for new clients in the state's Passport home-care program. Meanwhile, all state grant funding for more than 20,000 students enrolled in the state's 37 career colleges also has evaporated.

State lawmakers were able to restore \$50 million for child-care programs but decided to spend that money on child care for working parents. They pulled the plug on the state's Early Learning Initiative preschool program that served about 14,000 low-income kids.

And while state officials say 90 percent of the kids in the program either will move on to kindergarten or get some level of child care when the program shuts down Aug. 21, critics say that estimate is way too optimistic.

That worries Stacy Karkoff, a single mom from Elyria. She has watched her 4-year-old son, Ethan, transform into a new child during the year he's spent in the Early Learning program.

"He's gone from a child who barely spoke to a child that loves school and is always singing," she said.

But she worries that will stop on Aug. 21 when the preschool programs for Ethan and other poor kids are shut down.

Karkoff, who is unemployed, said she probably can't afford to pay for private day care. And she doesn't qualify for state-subsidized child care. That leaves her with few options once the program ends.

Dave Smith, executive director of Horizon Activities Center, which operates early childhood education centers in Lorain and Cuyahoga counties -- including the one that Karkoff's son attends -- said that at least 61 of the 198 Early Learning Initiative kids at his centers won't qualify for subsidized child care.

And his budget of \$5.5 million is taking a \$1.4 million hit -- both because of the elimination of the Early Learning program and a reduction in the rates the state will pay providers. Smith will have to close one Horizon center in central Lorain, and another near Elyria's Wilkes Villa housing project will cease to offer child care.

"I'm going to move to higher student-to-teacher ratios and lose qualified staff because I'm going to have to start saying, 'You can't make \$14 an hour,' and drop the pay to \$9 an hour," Smith said. "Instead of good, experienced teachers, I'm going to be getting people with high school diplomas and some in-service training."

State budget cuts have also meant that elderly people who want to stay in their homes instead of going into nursing homes are being put on a waiting list for the popular Passport program.

Ron Hill, CEO of the Western Reserve Area Agency on Aging, said about 600 spots open across the state in the program each month when seniors are moved to nursing homes or die. Before the budget cuts, seniors could be immediately placed in one of those spots.

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But now the waiting list statewide has already swelled to 1,500 seniors and counting. There are 445 people waiting at Hill's agency for Passport and assisted-living waivers. That means it will take at least several months for new enrollees to get into the program.

And the wait is extended because seniors already in nursing homes who apply for the program move to the front of the Passport line.

While the new state budget continues funding for Ohio's traditional four-year colleges -- albeit at a reduced level -- it eliminates the Ohio College Opportunity Grant program for career-college students. That includes thousands of Northeast Ohio students, such as those studying at Cleveland's Academy of Court Reporting or Strongsville's ITT Technical Institute.

"Eliminating all of their [state] assistance will result in disastrous consequences for thousands of career-college students and their families," R. David Rankin, executive director of the Ohio Association of Career Colleges and Schools, said in a prepared statement. "[Are] career college students somehow different or less worthy than students who attend other Ohio colleges?"

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Posted by **OtimOthy** on [08/03/09 at 8:01AM](#)

Well I'm sorry to have learned that there are 1,500 people waiting for Passport Care. This seems hard to believe. For one anyone who signs up for that Care gives up the Deed to their home and other savings. Which until this recession seemed to be working for the people that were okay with it. After all they are paying with their life savings until it's gone. Then they go on Welfare program. This child care has to be improved so all kids have a chance to be educated. I think a well educated kid is the way to go period. As for college kids they are old enough to get a job and go to college at night. It may not be part of their dream, but the degree is what's important here not the other perks that go with college.

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Posted by **Bedford2** on [08/03/09 at 8:36AM](#)

OtimOthy,

The mother of a friend of mine received home care from the Passport Program before she passed away. She didn't have to give up the deed to her home. The family is in the process of selling the home now. Actually they are expecting to close on the sell soon.

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