

## Health and Human Services Appropriations Subcommittee Decides on Recommended Cuts

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Jan 22, 2009 by Faroe Robinson – KCPW

On Wednesday, the legislature's Health and Human Services Appropriations Subcommittee was flooded with people pleading against cuts that would impact Medicaid, aging services, substance abuse, mental health and autism programs. KCPW's Faroe Robinson reports.

### Story Transcript

A majority of the 85 people who spoke, like Annie Campbell and Amy Baker, were parents of children who currently attend or are on the wait list for autism pre-school programs like Giant Steps.

"I feel like Giant Steps gave me my children back. They were locked somewhere inside their bodies, inside their minds. Somehow Giant Steps was able to pull them out. This is an amazing thing and has brought miracles to my family's life in the last two years. There are many children that are not able to have these same services and that is ridiculous."

Fiscal analysts are recommending that funding for these programs be cut completely in 2010.

Many disabled people spoke about the importance of Medicaid waiver programs that help them stay out of costly treatment centers or nursing homes. Several of these programs are slated to be cut. And the eligibility level for Medicaid programs could be lowered from 100 percent of poverty to 75 percent, affecting Miriam Hyde, who suffers from mental health issues. She's currently enrolled in the Medicaid work incentive program.

"That big of a portion of mental health funding, you're going to leave my family, and thousands of other Utahns without treatment, and we'll wind up with more homeless more in jail and more living in insanity."

Utah Health Policy Project Medicaid Policy Director Lincoln Nehring says legislators' proposed cuts are too drastic. He says if the committee cuts 15 percent from health programs, the state will lose \$125 million in federal matching funds.

"Part of this highlights the need to slow down and step back and think about what's going to happen in just a few short weeks when this economic recovery money arrives, and how that is going to change the budgeting equation. Right now we are taking some pretty drastic steps, that maybe we shouldn't be taking."

Nehring said President Elect Barack Obama's upcoming stimulus package could give the state \$150 million dollars for Medicaid programs, but only if they aren't cut. He added that the state should dip into the \$400 million dollar rainy day fund, which many legislators are hesitant to do.

Committee Co-Chairman Representative John Dougall said he still feels that state agencies need to run a leaner operation before programs should be touched.

"We've got to get government to start re-thinking how it does business. I've suggested to some, re-think why are you sending Christmas Cards out when you could be providing services with that money. We've

got the Department of Health who we pay to get people to stop smoking, spending \$9,000 to build a special building for people to smoke in at their facility, their employees. I mean to me its baffling the services that could be provided with that money that they then put into other activities."

Whatever cuts the committee settles on will have to be approved the executive appropriations committee on Monday.