



CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION FOR THE RETARDED
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June 22, 2005

The Honorable Wes Chesbro, Chairman
Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Committee
State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Senator Chesbro:

RE: Item 4300 of the Budget Act - Regional Center Services

As President of the California Association for the Retarded and the mother of a son with mental retardation, I am very troubled with the inconsistency of lawmakers receiving a 12 percent pay raise when the state has reduced and frozen funding since 1998 for many of the community programs for people with developmental disabilities provided through the regional center system. CAR is a nonprofit statewide organization with 10 local units that include family advocacy organizations, operators of day programs, and parent groups at state developmental centers.

The spending increase to which I am referring is a pay raise for state legislators recently approved by the California Citizens Compensation Commission. The commission studied consumer price indexes, cost of living scales, and various inflationary factors. The commission says legislators deserve the pay increase because they have not had a pay increase since 1998. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, Commissioner Thomas Dominguez said the 12 percent raise still lags behind the increase in the consumer price index over the last six years and further states the increase "really doesn't even put them back to where they were in 1999".

According to the *Los Angeles Times*, Assemblyman Mark Ridley-Thomas (D - Los Angeles) also said "elected officials have a right to be adequately and properly compensated and shouldn't have to feel defensive about it." He further said the \$138 a day (about \$20,000 a year) on top of salary that lawmakers get for food, travel, and lodging does not offset the costs of keeping two homes and separation from family.

Cost of living increases are a reality, and CAR strongly believes that individuals who care for people with developmental disabilities through community programs also deserve a rate increase. These community programs, which perform a very valuable and necessary service, also have experienced the same cost of living increases as legislators in areas such as utilities, insurance, rent and staff salaries. We further believe community workers also have a right to be adequately compensated. Yet since 1998 the state budget has failed to provide funds for the increased costs in many of these programs. As a result, programs have had to respond by reducing staffing levels, wages, and program hours.

The cost containment procedures implemented through the state budget have resulted in forced savings among these programs. In 2003-04, these procedures resulted in spending reductions of more than \$83.5 million from the General Fund according to a Senate Budget Subcommittee analysis - much higher than the savings originally anticipated. Yet these "temporary" measures have been made permanent by being built into the program's budget base.

In addition, the Department of Developmental Services has been very successful in its efforts to maximize federal funding in recent years. In 1999-2000, for example, the federal financial participation and related General Fund match for community programs totaled \$600 million. By 2005-06, DDS estimates this amount will have more than doubled to \$1.5 billion. Instead of reallocating these additional funds back into the programs to increase and enhance the services that were used to generate them, the state instead chose to use the "freed-up" General Fund dollars to increase spending in other areas of the state budget.

In this sense, the Legislature has acted the opposite of Robin Hood. Instead of taking from the rich to give to the needy, the Legislature has taken away from the poor, disabled, and elderly to give to police, firefighters, correctional officers, teachers and other public employees. In many cases, the Governor and state legislators have made long-term funding commitments to these other sectors, and these groups have continued to see an increase in their pay and benefits in spite of the budget deficit. In some cases, their pension increases have been so generous that the public sector is starting to have trouble sustaining these payments now and in future years.

While the Legislature's commitment to education is admirable, legislators also need to remember the commitment they have made to people with developmental disabilities. Through the passage of the Lanterman Act, legislators promised to provide a system of services that adequately met their needs. The constant freezes and cuts made to community programs, however, have resulted in a dangerous deterioration in the quality and quantity of community services. Workers are expected to struggle on a meager salary that ranges from a minimum wage to \$10 an hour with few if any benefits, retirement, or job stability. Each year during the last seven years, we in the disability community have asked for a cost of living increase, and all we have received are cuts and freezes.

You and Governor Schwarzenegger need to remember that caring for the disabled is an act that is basic to one's humanity and reflect that caring in your budget decisions.

Sincerely,

Marion Lieberman
President

cc: Members of Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Committee
Governor Schwarzenegger