

Local News

State's proposed budget cuts threaten CYO jobs program

Lee Strong
Barring a last-minute reprieve by the state legislature, cuts in the state budget will force the closure August 31 of the Catholic Youth Organization's successful job-development program for youths returning to the community after being incarcerated.

The \$124,000 program is being eliminated as part of Governor Mario Cuomo's proposed package to close the state's budget gap. Also endangered are similar programs in New York City, Buffalo and the Albany area.

According to a spokesman for the state Division for Youth, these programs were cut to save other programs that affected more youths in more areas. The spokesman, Jay Silverman, acknowledged that the legislature could save the programs when it considers the governor's proposed cuts, but that it is impossible at this time to predict the legislature's actions.

"It's a very difficult cut for us to make," Silverman said. "These four programs were working. We'd even requested increased budgets for them — from \$600,000 to \$1,680,000 next year — because we had anticipated expanding the program into other cities."

Meanwhile, the local CYO is attempting to

deal with the consequences of the cuts. Two CYO staff members working with the job program, including program director Bob Mahar, have already been notified that they will be laid off, according to Jama Dodson, executive director of the CYO.

In addition, state officials assured CYO in March that the contract would be renewed. As a result, CYO officials spent \$32,000 of the agency's funds to keep the program while they waited — expecting to be reimbursed when the contract was signed.

"We are upset because of the program being cut and the service being lost, and the way the state is treating us," Dodson said. "The way the state manages its contracts has a devastating effect on agencies serving communities in the state. I've known of agencies that went without a contract for as much as nine months."

Despite the \$32,000 expenditure, the agency is not in any serious financial difficulties, Dodson said. She said she still expects the state to reimburse the CYO for its expenses through August 31.

Silverman acknowledged that the CYO had acted in good faith in keeping the program

operating without a contract, and that the state Division for Youth would do everything in its power, to ensure that the Rochester agency would receive its money.

Although the money is of concern, Dodson said the CYO is more concerned that the youths are losing the program.

"These Division for Youth kids coming out now will not have employment services available designed to specifically meet their needs," Dodson said.

"These are kids who often have developmental disabilities, and certainly educational disabilities," noted Sharon Hoffman, a spokeswoman for the Rochester-Monroe County Youth Bureau. "They don't have the skills to get a job and keep a job."

The program works in conjunction with other programs for formerly incarcerated youths between the ages of 16 and 20. It provides job counseling and assessment services, and — where needed — job training. It also offers the youths advice about how to behave in a job interview and how to dress when applying for jobs. As part of the program, the agency also finds appropriate work for the youths.

Dodson noted that part of the program's

success comes from producing concrete results that the youths can see. "These kids want something that's going to give them a practical, concrete outcome," she said. "We get them a job. That's a practical, concrete thing"

Once the youths are employed, CYO counselors keep in touch with them and their employers to help resolve problems and to provide support. "It's not just a matter of getting a kid a job and letting them get fired after just a few days," Dodson said. "It's being there to give them intensive support."

Such support is vital to the youths' success, Hoffman asserted. In addition, because of the CYO's reputation, employers are more likely to take a risk with the youths. "I think employers have confidence in the CYO," Hoffman commented.

A major value of the program is that it helps the youths avoid the problems that led them into trouble in the first place, Dodson noted. "A kid without a job is much more likely to find themselves getting into something they shouldn't," the director said.

Although the six-month program costs the state \$1,200 per youth, ultimately it saves money, she added, noting that the same six months in jail — were the youths to be reincarcerated — would cost the state \$35,000 per youth.

Since the job program began in October, 1987, about 70 youths have been referred to it by the state. Approximately 50 percent of the youths are currently employed, either in their original placements or in other jobs. The

Continued on Page 5

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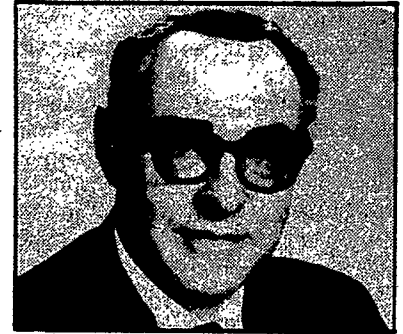
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