

# Catholic Courier

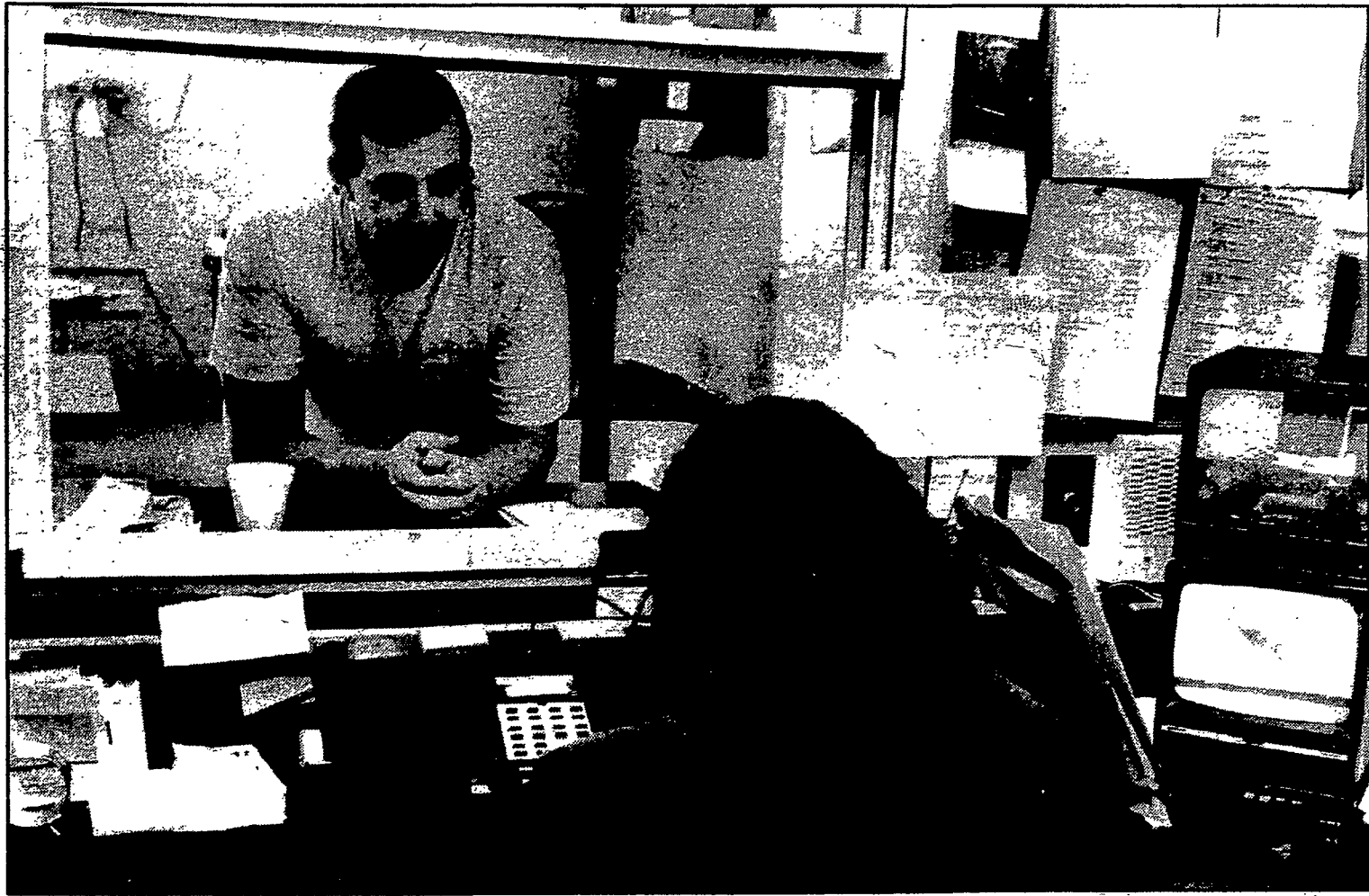
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S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

Francis Hospitality Center resident Tom Burns chats with Office Manager Debra Jackson during a recent day at the Joseph Avenue shelter run by the Catholic Family Center.

## Church agencies brace for worst as debate begins over budget cuts

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

Speaking on behalf of New York's bishops before the state legislature, Albany's Bishop Howard J. Hubbard painted an ominous picture if Gov. George Pataki's proposed budget is implemented.

"Some have suggested that the church and other charitable organizations will simply have to care for the welfare recipients who lose benefits, the elderly infirm without health care, the poor families evicted from their homes," the bishop said in testimony before the senate finance committee and the assembly ways and means committee Feb. 13.

"Let us be clear: We cannot," he asserted.

To back up his point, the bishop stressed that in 1993 alone New York state's Catholic Charities served nearly one million people with such emergency assistance as meals, shelter, clothing and help for the abused.

"Proposed (state) government cutbacks could lead to double or triple that number of requests," the bishop said. "While we will always remain faithful to our commitment to serve the poor, we simply do not have the capacity to help all those who will need help."

The governor's cuts are rooted in a desire to curb a projected deficit of \$5 billion and to give New Yorkers a long-desired tax cut spread out over the next four years. When implemented, the

tax cut would result in a state revenue reduction of \$6.8 billion over the next four years, according to Joseph L. Buttegieg, state budget analyst for the New York Catholic Conference.

But Bishop Hubbard and other social service advocates claim that in making his bid for taxpayers' hearts, the governor disproportionately strikes at funding for programs that help those living on society's fringe. Additionally, by seeking short-term tax relief, the governor and his supporters may create long-term social disaster, the bishop and other critics contend.

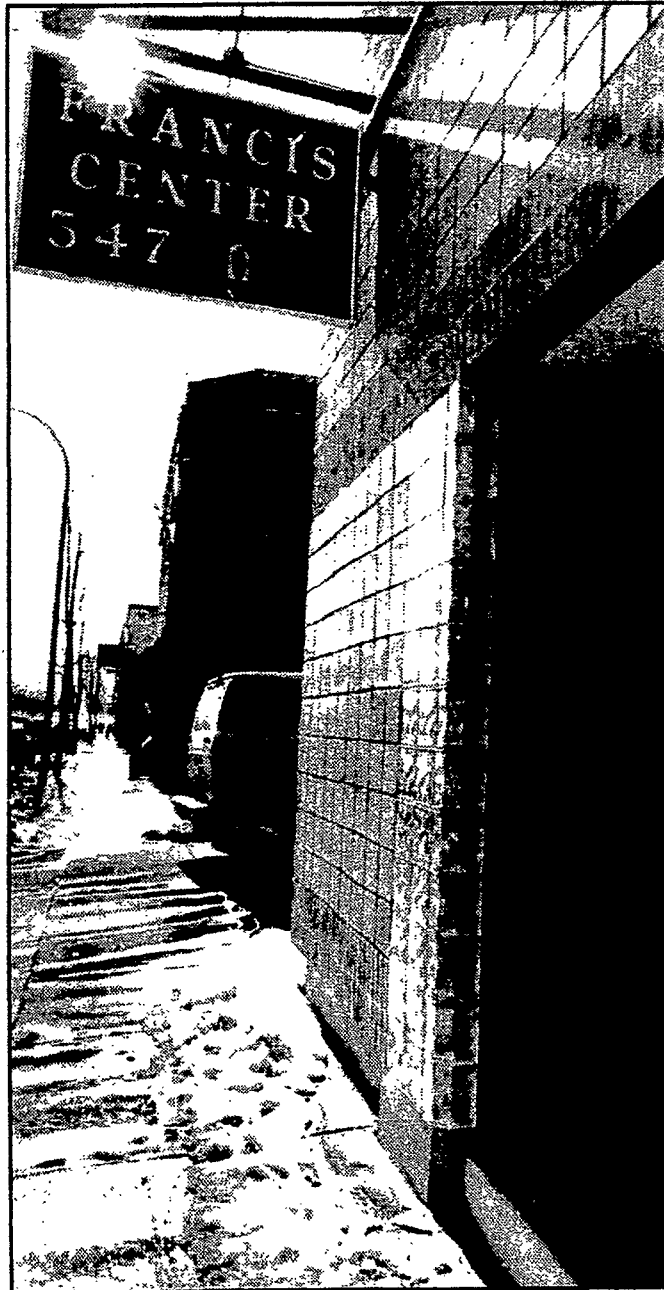
In his Feb. 13 testimony, Hubbard summed up many of the complaints of social service advocates in the state:

- Cutting medical assistance for home health care will result in more costly inpatient care at hospitals and nursing homes.

- Reducing public assistance benefits for poor families will increase malnutrition, homelessness, illness and expensive hospitalization.

- Not-for-profit agencies, hospitals and shelters who serve the poor and sick will be forced by cutbacks to lay off workers and contribute to increased unemployment and poverty.

Defenders of scaled back government funding often claim that the public will support social welfare policies of their liking through private donations to agencies that promote the taxpayers' beliefs.



New York Gov. George Pataki's proposed budget cuts could affect the operation of Rochester's Francis Hospitality Center, 547 Joseph Ave.

## Delegates will lobby agenda to legislators

Thirty-five diocesan representatives are scheduled to travel to Albany this Tuesday, Feb. 28, to join Catholic lobbyists from throughout the state in promoting the New York State Catholic Conference's legislative priorities.

According to Judy Taylor, communications manager for Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Rochester, the diocese alternates between sending a smaller and larger number of representatives to Albany for Lobby Day every year.

Last year, for example, scores of representatives loaded on buses traveled to Albany, whereas this year, the smaller number of lobbyists will travel in cars to the capital, she said.

Taylor added that the diocese this year will concentrate on sending representatives to legislators' home offices.

In a statement released by the NYSCC, the church's representatives will lobby on behalf of the following eight objectives, each followed by examples of specific legislation designed to implement the objective.

- *Protecting human lives* - opposition to the death penalty, physician-assisted suicide, and state-funded Medicaid abortions.

- *Fostering quality education* - funding to enable parents to choose their own school; increased funding for learning technology in all schools.

- *Providing economic security and opportunity for those in need* - enactment of child-support enforcement measures; opposition to proposals that penalize poor families for the addition of a new child.

- *Ensuring access to quality health care* - creation of an impaired infant compensation fund.

- *Providing services for the frail and special-needs population* - creation of a state commission for the deaf and hard of hearing; expansion of services for people with AIDS and HIV.

- *Protecting the ability of government and non-government agencies to provide for the needy* - restoration of a progressive income tax; affirmation of the recognized right to exercise religious conscience in the provision of publicly funded services.

- *Enacting humane criminal justice policies* - repeal of mandatory life sentences for those coerced into illegal drug transportation; increased funding for alternatives to incarceration.

- *Protecting society* - especially women and children, from violence; increased funding for shelters for domestic violence victims.

- Rob Cullivan

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