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Apprehension the rule for agencies that rely on state

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Spokespeople for agencies that receive funding from the state of Illinois remained apprehensive following Gov. Pat Quinn's budget actions Thursday.

Addus HealthCare

Sharol Carter, program director for Addus HealthCare, 2323 Stevenson Drive, worries that families will be burdened and finances stretched if cuts affect her agency's adult daycare program.

On any given day, between 18 and 21 people spend time at the facility while their caregivers to work, Carter said. The program is open to anyone older than 18, but almost all the clients are at least 70 years old, she said.

Wii bowling. Visits to the zoo. Trips to the library. Crafts. Exercise. Physical and speech therapy.

"Here at the center, they do a variety of activities," Carter said. "Most of them can't stay home alone. Their families work during the day."

The state pays for most of the clients, Carter said. Without the program, many would have to go to nursing homes, which would cost more money.

For now, all Carter and her clients can do is hope for the best.

"I do know they're making cuts," Carter said. "I don't know how it will affect this program."

SPARC

After speaking with state Department of Human Service officials on Thursday, one thing is clear for SPARC in Springfield, according to Carlissa Puckett, SPARC chief executive officer.

The agency's Epilepsy Resource Center, funded with grants from state general revenue, will close, Puckett said.

In existence since 1978, the resource center provides support for epileptics and educates employers, teachers, students and others about the condition. The program covers 35 counties, Puckett said, and the average annual cost to help an epileptic is \$60. Beyond epileptics, the program helps those close to them, she said.

"Our staff would talk to students about what does it mean to have a seizure, what does it look like, what do you do, so that when a classmate has a seizure, they aren't frightened and they know what to do," Puckett said.

Puckett fears there will be more cuts, but she can't be sure how deep they will be or when they might come. SPARC, which helps people with developmental disabilities, receives about \$8 million of its annual \$9 million budget from the state, which has been slow to pay anyway.

"We did recently get a payment for last October," Puckett said. "Currently, I think they owe us about \$2 million."

How does the agency make ends meet with such delayed payments?

"Magic," Puckett said.

Springfield School District

The fact that the state doesn't plan to reduce general state aid, which amounts to \$6,119 per student, for school districts comes as cold comfort to officials in District 186.

"Everything else is going up, as you know," said Alexander Ikejiaku, director of human resources. "Of course, you know that we have gone through a period of layoffs, and we're still reeling from it. If things stay at the same level, it still amounts to a cut."

Gov. Pat Quinn said Thursday he does intend to make severe cuts in state spending on school transportation and reading improvement.

But there were still more questions than answers Thursday, Ikejiaku said.

"Our folks are, right now, crunching the numbers and should have something by Tuesday or so," Ikejiaku said.

He didn't watch the governor's press conference on the budget, but staff members did, Ikejiaku said.

"Actually, I might have called in the middle of it," Ikejiaku said. "They were torn between taking my call (and watching the governor). They didn't know what the call might have been about."

University of Illinois Springfield

UIS chancellor Richard Ringeisen says his concerns go beyond the university.

"I'm very worried about not just higher education, but the state of Illinois," Ringeisen said. "Sooner or later, we have to face up to the issues we have in Illinois."

As of Wednesday, Ringeisen said, UIS had received just 60 percent of the money it currently is owed by the state. That amounts to about \$9 million, virtually all of it earmarked for teaching.

"You can't have a lot of hope that we're eventually going to get all that money," Ringeisen said. "What we've done is cut various monies all over the place to keep the academic function alive."

Already, Ringeisen said, he must personally approve every new hire, from professors to employees who mow the grass. The university will probably have to borrow money, or establish a line of credit, to make it through the end of the year. Tuition is going up by 9.5 percent for incoming freshmen.

What would Ringeisen do to fix the state's fiscal woes?

"I've thought a lot about that," Ringeisen answered. "I think most experts are in agreement: It's going to take a combination of budget cuts that none of us want to see and tax increases none of us want to see."

"The truth is, we've got to quit pretending this doesn't exist and do something about it."

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