



For Immediate Release

350 Santa Rosa Protesters Demand End to Budget Cuts For Agencies Serving Individuals with Disabilities

SANTA ROSA, May 5 – More than 350 men and women, including staff and participants of North Bay agencies for people with disabilities, protested new proposals by the state to reduce funding for programs for the disabled.

Gathering outside the Rattigan State Building in Downtown Santa Rosa, protesters took their turn with a bullhorn to voice opposition to more funding cuts now under consideration by the State Legislature.

“No cuts to MediCal,” said Liza Townsend, a resident of Santa Rosa and long-time participant in programs at Becoming Independent. “We don’t want to get kicked out of our group homes.”

Danielle Tuttle, also of Santa Rosa and who is employed through BI’s employment programs for people with disabilities, said the funding cuts will threaten her ability to make a modest living.

“Save our jobs,” she appealed to legislative workers who met the crowd outside the State Building. “We have families to support.”

Photos of the rally available at: www.facebook.com/BecomingIndependent

Other protesters carried signs saying, No More Cuts, Save Our Services, Lanterman Act = Independence, How’Bout You Take 4% Cut , Don’t Send Me to the Institution, and Don’t Take Our Independence.

The protest rally was called by Becoming Independent and included both staff and participants for the agency, the largest non-profit dedicated to serving people with disabilities in the North Bay. BI serves 1300 men and women in programs operating in Healdsburg, Santa Rosa, Sonoma, and Napa and Solano counties.

Also present for the hour-long protest were staff and participants from North Bay Industries, Old Adobe Developmental Services, Oaks of Hebron, Redwood Empire Industries, United Cerebral Palsy of the North Bay and Napa Valley Support Services.

Cami Weaver, CEO of BI, said the agencies wanted legislators representing the North Bay to know that they won’t stand for more funding cuts.

BI already has suffered a \$470,000 cut in state revenues under a 3 percent cut approved by the legislature and Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger last year and continuing this year.

“Now the state Department of Development Services is proposing another 1.25 percent across-the board cut for our agency and others,” she said.

Weaver said a 1.25 percent cut would increase revenue shortfalls by another \$156,000. Added to an additional \$250,000 revenue cut due to state-mandated closure days that would bring BI's total financial hit to \$876,000.

"That's unacceptable," she said.

District representatives of Assembly members Wes Chesbro and Noreen Evans spoke briefly to the crowd Wednesday.

"The legislative aides welcomed us and told us that they need to hear our voices. They said their bosses 'get it' and understand that we can't stand any more cuts," said Weaver.

"They said Evans and Chesbro would try to block the governor from making any more cuts, and we'll be back to make sure they do," said Weaver.

The hour-long protest and rally ended after State Building officials, backed by state police and California Highway Patrol officers, refused to allow the crowd inside the building.

They said anyone attempting to enter the building to protest faced the possibility of arrest or citation.

"It was a very good rally, and the people we served appreciated the chance to speak their minds," Weaver said. "This is just the first of many demonstrations our legislature can expect if it tries to solve the state's budget crisis on the backs of people with disabilities."

"It's going to be a long spring and summer, and we are absolutely coming back," she said.

For more information, call Cami Weaver, BI CEO, 707-524-6600.

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