

Budget Alert! Governor Paterson's Deficit Reduction Act Will Harm Services for Individuals with Developmental Disabilities: Action Needed Now!

As you all know, Governor David Paterson has called a special session of the Legislature on November 10, 2009, for the purpose of enacting mid-year reductions in the current state budget, to address the state's ongoing fiscal crisis. Among other things, the Governor has proposed a 10% across the board cut for all state agencies, including OMRDD (the Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, which funds most of LDA's adult programs and services, and some services for children, as well). For the last 5 months of the state's current fiscal year (ending March 31, 2010), that proposed 10% cut would result in a loss of \$65.4 million in state funding for existing OMRDD programs and services. In addition, most OMRDD funded services receive federal Medicaid matching funds that are several times the amount of State funding for those services. Accordingly, if \$65.4 million in state funds are withdrawn from the OMRDD system, a significantly greater sum of federal Medicaid matching funds will also be lost. In fact, when calculated over the course of a full budget year, best estimates are that the Governor's 10% reduction plan will result in a loss of over \$375 million in total funding for OMRDD.

OMRDD Commissioner Diana Jones Ritter has been very clear about her concern that OMRDD cannot sustain budget cuts at this level without a real, negative impact on existing programs and services. Because of the serious, negative impact that these proposed budget cuts will have on our field, a grass roots advocacy campaign is underway across the state, in which parents, staff, families and friends of individuals with developmental disabilities are contacting their legislators and requesting that they oppose the proposed cuts to OMRDD's budget, and instead find other ways to address our state's fiscal crisis. The Governor's proposed deficit reduction plan cannot take effect unless and until it is enacted by the Legislature, and therefore the Legislature needs to be the focus of our efforts for the next three weeks until the special session scheduled for November 10th.

We truly need everyone to be a part of this grassroots effort. Here is what we ask you to do. Please contact your legislators by phone, in person or by letter (if you choose letter, please try to send an actual handwritten hard copy by snail mail—we are advised that right now, e-mail is the least effective way to get our message heard because legislators are not getting to their e-mail), as soon as possible, and ask them to oppose the Governor's proposed cuts to OMRDD. Along with this alert are advocacy talking points that you can feel free to use, in whole or in part, in your advocacy efforts.

Advocacy from families, staff and friends does make a difference and if there were ever a time that we need to make that difference, it is now. LDA is deeply committed to preserving all existing programs and staff positions within our chapters across the state and to continuing our never-ending commitment to the pursuit of excellence in all we do, despite this difficult environment, but we desperately need your help to ensure that we continue to have the resources to meet our commitments!!

Please, please take the time to connect with your legislators--it is so critical and timely right now! The most important thing is to make your message personal--explain your connection to our field, tell a story about your loved one with a developmental disability--anything that will help make it real for the legislators.