

Vetoed leave Yolo short again

By Jonathan Edwards

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WOODLAND — Yolo County officials blasted the governor Tuesday for costing them at least \$6 million.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger vetoed a bill earlier this month that would have allowed Yolo County to get a lump-sum payment of as much as \$2.5 million for money the state is scheduled to pay out over the next 15 years.

And using his power to kill specific budget appropriations, Schwarzenegger slashed money for counseling emotionally troubled special education students, which hit the county to the tune of about \$1.5 million. He also cut money to provide child care for welfare recipients juggling parenthood, a job and school, another \$2 million.

Schwarzenegger's budget vetoes were "very much directed at children, particularly poor, disabled and at-risk children," county Board of Supervisors Chair Helen Thomson said at Tuesday's meeting when the board reviewed how the state budget affects Yolo County.

"It's a very poor review of his time in Sacramento."

Schwarzenegger proposed a \$1.2 billion reserve in his suggested budget earlier this year, said H.D. Palmer, state Department of Finance spokesman. The Legislature gave him a budget with about \$365 million, which the governor felt was "too low." Therefore, he made an additional \$963 million in cuts to achieve a "more prudent" reserve of \$1.3 billion.

It had nothing to do with the merit of the programs, Palmer added. "The veto itself wasn't a commentary on the program," he said. "For all the vetoes, there were trade-offs and tough choices."

Despite the governor's veto, therapy and counseling for troubled special education students will continue, because they're required by federal law, said Kim Suderman, director of Yolo County's Alcohol, Drug and Mental Health Department.

Under the program, about \$1.5 million pays to help 122 students countywide. They receive personal, family and group therapy and have professionals work with probation officers, teachers and social services. About two-thirds of the money comes from the federal government, and the rest from the state.

But the governor's veto has locals asking: Where's the money going to come from?

The two options are county government or the county office of education, and the two offices are still trying to hash out the details. Yolo County has been paying since July 1 with the expectation the state eventually would pay once a budget went through.

“Somebody's responsible,” Suderman said after the meeting, “but if the state's not paying, who is?”

Mental health wasn't the only area to take a hit. The governor executed a “drastic reduction” in vetoing the \$256 million that paid for child care for the roughly 54,000 kids of former welfare recipients, said Elvia Garcia-Ayala, community services director for the city of Davis, which administers the program countywide. Locally, \$1.9 million pays to care for 319 children, including 47 from Davis.

Parents in the program haven't received welfare income checks for at least two years, Garcia-Ayala said. They have jobs and are going to school. “These are the success stories of the system,” she said.

The program helps parents get “out of the cycle of poverty,” echoed Supervisor Jim Provenza of Davis. By yanking the money, “it pulls the rug out right when they're establishing themselves.

“It makes no sense at all and will increase costs in the long run.”

Garcia-Ayala fears the cuts could force parents to choose between work or school and their kids. “For a lot of folks, it may mean the difference between having child care so they can go to work,” she said.

Local officials are hoping Schwarzenegger's decisions are overturned when a new governor takes office in January, and they're not alone. Leaders in the state Assembly and Senate have discussed revisiting the budget when a new Legislature and governor are sworn in.

Said the county'd budget guru, Pat Leary, “We'll just have to watch the state and follow their actions.”

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