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## Mental Health Advocates Face an Uphill Battle

By KRISTEN McQUEARY

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The way America spends its resources sometimes infuriates Jennifer Humbert of Crete, a social worker and suburban mother of two children who have [mental health](#) issues.

“When I watch the [space shuttle](#) take off or I see us sending more boys overseas to get killed, it makes me furious,” Ms. Humbert said. “Yes, people in other countries deserve to have better lives. So do the children who live here.”

Two of Ms. Humbert’s children, Joshua, 13, and Emme, 9, both adopted as babies and born to mothers who abused drugs and alcohol, suffer from mental illnesses that probably developed during their earliest moments in the womb.

Living in Illinois may add to their problems. The state faces one of the nation’s most dire budget deficits, and mental health programs for children, along with hundreds of other services for the most vulnerable, have been ravaged by deep cuts. Gov. Pat Quinn announced the closing of three mental health centers last month.

“We had a huge fight with the state to get grant money for my daughter,” said Ms. Humbert, who works in the mental health field. She pointed to states with better track records in dealing with mentally ill children and said, “Honestly, we have talked many, many times about moving.”

As lawmakers return to Springfield on Tuesday to vote on bills that Mr. Quinn vetoed during the summer and to tie up loose ends from their annual spring session, which adjourned May 31, interest groups, including mental health advocates, see the session as an opportunity to ask for money again.

But lawmakers have few dollars to toss around. The state faces \$3 billion in unpaid bills and an \$80 billion underfinanced pension system. In addition, lawmakers are looking toward the 2012 election cycle and a promise to roll back the state’s 5 percent personal income tax to 3.75 percent during the next three years.

“In the last 18 months, we have had very few choices,” said Representative Sara Feigenholtz, Democrat of Chicago, chairwoman of the House budget committee that in May cut financing to social service programs by about 17 percent. “The promise we made to the public is that the income tax would phase out, or part of it, in four years. So we have to approach this budget situation from many different angles. Prevention programs become a fatality. We’re in crisis mode.”

House and Senate lawmakers on budget committees are expected to deal with minor budget changes during the veto session, but even left-leaning Democrats who support spending on social services are not rallying to reverse the [closings](#) Mr. Quinn announced of three mental health institutions, two centers for the developmentally disabled and two correctional centers.

The cuts in mental health programs for children have made it difficult for the state to carry out the Illinois Children's Mental Health Act of 2003. The act required Illinois to create a better network of services for children who show signs of mental health problems, but the cuts are bringing to a halt any progress made since then.

“There are parts of the state that have no child or adolescent [psychiatrists](#),” said Barbara Shaw, director of the Illinois Violence Prevention Authority, who has worked to carry out the 2003 law. “Kids who are seriously emotionally disturbed, it's estimated only half of those children are really getting the services that they need.”

The uncertainty worries Ms. Humbert, whose son receives services from an adoption program that is not threatened at the moment, but whose daughter gets state-financed help from a care worker trained to address Emme's attention deficit [hyperactivity](#) and [bipolar](#) disorders.

“It's a godsend,” Ms. Humbert said. “She has someone who takes her into the community, besides us, and teaches her how to act appropriately, how to go to a restaurant and not wander over to someone else's booth and pick food off their plate or crawl under the table. It's a huge help.”

*Kristen McQueary covers state politics for The Chicago News Cooperative and Chicago Public Media.  
kmcqueary@chicago*

*newscoop.org*