

State-funded child care in jeopardy

Agency runs out of funds for low-income families

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GALESBURG — Debbi Johnson says she will fight for state-subsidized child care and the bill that would restore payments to private providers.

The Galesburg resident has been a private provider for 11 years. Her clients and their children come to her through Child Care Resource and Referral, a state program that helps low-income families find affordable care for kids. Johnson charges \$22.51 per child a day for child care. The state pays a portion and the parent or parents pay the rest, based on their monthly income.

But what she earns is secondary to what she called “my responsibility to my community.”

“I chose to be in this program for a very specific reason,” Johnson said Tuesday. “I was once on public aid. I needed help and housing and food stamps. And I needed day care. It allowed me to work.

“That allowed me to better my life, little by little. That’s what the program does. I believe in helping single mothers and low-income families. Having affordable day care allows people to better their lives.”

Unless HB 6141 is passed in Springfield today, there will be a two-month break in state funding for an estimated 40,000 Illinois child care providers. The Illinois Department of Human Services sent letters last week to child care providers informing them the agency ran out of funding for the \$896 million-a-year program and would be unable to make child care subsidy payments until the new fiscal year, which begins July 1.

Sponsored by Chicago Democrat Rep. Sara Feigenholtz and introduced Friday, the bill would immediately transfer \$73.6 million within the state budget to prevent a halt in subsidy payments. Gov. Pat Quinn has indicated he’ll sign it if it passes — crucial news to more than 85,000 low-income parents who get state-underwritten day care help.

Rep. Don Moffitt, R-Gilson, met Monday morning with a number of day care providers and parents who rely on the subsidy. On his way to Springfield Tuesday morning he said he is “leaning toward voting for the bill.”

“The meeting was an excellent one,” Moffitt said. “It put faces on a real-life issue and gave voice to an important issue. And, really, that meeting affirmed what I knew to certainly be the case — that providing low-income families with help paying for day care is really important in so many ways.”

Moffitt said one of the women he met works two full-time jobs and has no way to pay for day care without some support from the state.

“Ending the program, shutting off funding with two months left in the fiscal year, puts working parents, mothers going to school and the providers in jeopardy,” he said. “Programs that help, say, a single mother go to school and have a change at a better job or better opportunities is a program that avoids larger costs down the road.”

Moffitt said the key to his support of the bill is recognition that it a supplemental appropriation and the funds are coming from another existing line item.

“We are not increasing spending. We set a \$33.2 billion limit on the budget and, as long as there is nothing else attached to it that would take us over that limit, I have to say I’m inclined to support the bill,” he said. “Again, I just feel like the cuts would come with serious ramifications that should be avoided.”

Johnson plotted out some of the ramifications.

“I provide second- and third-shift child care,” she explained. “The children who come here, their mothers are waitresses and nursing home workers. A few are mothers going to school.

“These are people who work hard every day. Every day. They can’t miss a day of work because they can’t afford it. And you know what, they work and they still need food stamps and help with child care. Take it away, and you are taking a mother out of a job or school. Take it away and you might be taking a child out of a safe environment.”

Johnson said working families or with parents in school send a much-needed message to kids.

“Kids see, They know,” she said. “Kids come here and talk about their mothers’ jobs or that they want to go to college. They understand that work is something they will want when they grow up. The goal is sometime down the families on the subsidy move off of it, then contribute to it because they have better jobs and better lives.

“This is what we do for each other in a community.”