

Illinois Issues blog

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House to take up new spending for child-care providers

By Ashley Griffin

Child-care providers worried that they may stop getting payments from the state may be able to breathe a little easier soon.

Relief in the form of a supplemental appropriations bill could be on the way after [Gov. Pat Quinn's administration sent out letters last week to notify parents and child-care providers that funding for state funded day care centers had fallen short](#). Providers were told payments would be delayed until July 1. Money for the program comes from the same fund as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), which has seen an 80 percent increase in enrollees since 2009.

According to Rep. Sara Feigenholtz, a Democrat from Chicago, [Senate Bill 2450](#) would restore \$73.6 million to pay providers to the end of the Fiscal Year 2012. The subsidies are used to cover child care for low-income families. The bill also calls for \$151 million to pay down FY12 Medicaid bills. The money would come from unspent federal funds. "These are jobs, these are mostly single parents who really need to get to get to the workplace, and they need consistent, stable child care, and its our obligation to provide it to them. We under-appropriated last year to them, so this is an emergency supplemental, and we need to push it through so women can get to work and their children [can] have child care services," said Feigenholtz, who expects the bill to pass Wednesday in the House. A delay in payments would affect up to 40,000 child-care providers and 85,000 low-income families. Feigenholtz said she and other lawmakers have been flooded with calls from providers and parents.

Service Employees International Union (SEIU) held a rally in the state Capitol on Tuesday to protest against the delay in payment to child-care providers, as well as budget cuts to human services programs. Many of the protesters said they believed that corporations should pay more in taxes so that human services and other areas of state government do not have to suffer cuts. "We are taking a stand against these budget cuts, at the same time they are cutting our budget. They are letting these greedy corporations get away with murder,"

said Keith Kelleher, SEIU Healthcare Illinois president. “It ain’t right, it ain’t so, and it’s gonna change. Let’s just remember who created this budget mess. It wasn’t seniors or people with disabilities, it wasn’t our public employees, it wasn’t our public servants, it wasn’t seniors who went on home care, it wasn’t low-income parents who rely on child care to get to work, it wasn’t the residents of low-income neighborhoods who depend on our services. It was the greedy corporations and the rich executives.”

Faith Arnold, a Bellwood-based family child care provider, said that if the state delays payments, she cannot get a line of credit to cover the costs for those families unable to pay on their own. “When a family is put in a situation that they don’t have care for their children, where do the children go? What happens to that child? Are children roaming the streets? It’s not just about my service, but it’s about what happens in our community. Who is going to be that child’s keeper?”

Although the possibility of additional funds may be on the way for this fiscal year, under the FY 13 budget, Gov. Pat Quinn has proposed \$85 million in cuts to the Child Care Assistance Program. The reduction could set up another shortfall next year. An inquiry to Quinn’s budget office was not returned. However, the Department of Human Services supports SB2450.

“It’s what’s right and what’s wrong. You cannot solve the budget cuts by putting people out of work, but if the governor gets his \$85 million in cuts, 165,000 children will not have child care, and 85,000 parents will not have child care. That’s wrong,” Kelleher said. Feigenholtz said lawmakers are working to see that the program is properly funded next fiscal year, but at the same time, the need for budget cuts is a reality. “We are trying to fix it, but again, we’re going to do the best we can. But we are doing the best we can to make this a top priority,” she said.

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