

# Times-Standard

## An unprincipled approach to balancing the budget

Phillip R. Crandall/For the Times-Standard

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Governor Schwarzenegger has released his May revise of the state budget and, as anticipated, it contains a number of proposals that would dramatically impact health and human services programs.

The biggest hit is the proposed complete elimination of CalWORKs, our bottom line child safety-net program, without which literally thousands of local families would face immediate risk of housing loss and hunger. Then there's a proposed 60 percent reduction in local Mental Health Services funding, a statewide reduction of \$750 million to In-Home Supportive Services, another \$750 million cut to basic medical care for the poor, a \$133 million subtraction from Child Welfare Services and a host of other hits to Healthy Families, Medi-Cal and other vital services we provide.

In addition, there are several cost shifts of note from foster care, from adoptions, from child welfare services and food stamps -- all of which would leave counties responsible for most of the costs of operating these critical programs.

State officials have said during budget hearings that these are fiscal decisions, not policy decisions. That sounds to me like another way of saying they're going to do things to balance the budget that they know they can't hope to justify in human terms.

This unprincipled approach to budget-balancing will be subject to considerable discussion over the coming weeks -- and likely months -- and we will be working with our legislators and associations to find

alternative approaches that make better fiscal and ethical sense.

The long list of reductions would essentially turn back the clock to the 1960s in terms of mental health services, would put millions of children and families at risk of homelessness and would force thousands of elderly into more restrictive care than would be available with basic, less expensive in-home services. Families in poverty and children experiencing neglect would also be at increased risk without the resources necessary to engage them.

Especially in times of economic hardship, it makes no sense to cut core services our children, families and older adults depend upon for their very survival. California can and must do better than to develop budget "solutions" that cost more in the long run and destroy services that protect the lives of its most vulnerable citizens.

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