

State of New Jersey

Senate Budget & Appropriations Committee

Senator Barbara Buono, Chair

Public Hearing

March 25, 2008

9:00 a.m.

Gloucester Institute of Technology

The McLean Fitness Center

Deptford, NJ

BUDGET TESTIMONY

BY: Tom Bruno

Good Morning Madame Chair and members of this distinguished Committee... Thank you for the opportunity of addressing you today.

I come here today as a concerned citizen and as a state worker.

This Budget exacerbates a perilous trend of diminishing state monies to fund operating costs of the six (6) Developmental Centers and the consequential reliance on greater and greater amounts of unrealized federal monies to offset those cuts. Additionally, there exists a critical staff shortage in the Community-based services as well as our State facilities. The over-reliance on federal monies in the face of an ever-increasing staff shortage, which has not been helped by the Governor's hiring and promotional freeze for the past 2 years, is a prescription for budgetary and social programmatic disaster and is, at best, perfunctory. Further, there are those who have falsely claimed that community based services are cheaper than State run hospitals or Developmental Centers. The fact is that the community providers deliver services "a la carte." Each service, such as nursing care, doctor care, pharmaceuticals, PT services, OT services, dental care, X-rays, blood work, ophthalmologist services, social work services, behavioral, psychological, and psychiatric services, recreation services, speech therapy, and transportation are paid for separately in the community while they are provided on a routine basis at the state-run facilities. National studies of the costs have consistently demonstrated that community providers cost states more than 20% more. In the case of the Psychiatric Hospitals, more than 75% of the funding comes from the federal Disproportionate Share Hospital Program... funding that is lost once the facility shuts down and the care is provided on an individual basis or a community provider basis.

This budget does NOTHING to invest in institutional staffing or in the buildings themselves so as to enhance the quality of care provided to our most vulnerable citizens. These capital improvements are long overdue as many of our institutions are more than 50 years old, requiring constant repairs and maintenance, and yet, capital improvements are recommended at ZERO, despite the availability of federal matching funds.

I am a Head Supervisor at Hunterdon Developmental Center, where we are home to nearly 600 people who present with varying degrees of mental retardation and mental illness. Each of these individuals generates more than \$500 each day in federal ICF/MR monies. This is far above the \$340 per day in actual costs. In other words, Hunterdon Developmental Center generates enough federal monies to be self sufficient and provide extra revenues of approximately \$35 million per year to pay for community services. This is just one (1) of six (6) such revenue streams the state cannot afford to lose. Moreover, Developmental Centers have become the final destination for individuals who cannot be maintained in so-called community settings either due to extreme medical needs or extreme behavioral complexities. Far too often, we have transferred individuals out into the community only to have them die or be returned to us with broken backs, or limbs, some requiring feeding tubes, some in wheel chairs, and many with excessive drugs being used to control extremely violent behaviors. Yet there is no political or media outcry like we have seen with Ancora. It is accepted by politicians and by the Department of Human Services as "equal or better" treatment. It's absurd, it's inhumane, and it's dangerous. Economically and philosophically, it is inane to jettison these frail individuals into an ill-equipped community setting with an 85% turn-over rate, knowing full well that the state-run

facilities will be equally ill-equipped to handle these individuals when they finally do return in a state of severe behavioral acuity or in a bad medical state, as has been the case historically.

This Administration is making a serious mistake in their philosophy of care for the mentally ill and developmentally disabled. Their dichotomy of care is a flawed model that fails to recognize community providers and State facilities as elements within a vast continuum of care. Instead, this budget embraces the viewpoint that they are mutually exclusive, independent models of care unto themselves. The Governor unfortunately has returned to the dichotic model and I would hope that this legislative body recognizes the need to keep both the community AND the State facilities viable as key elements in the overall continuum of care.

There is a lot to be said about a society that places more emphasis on giving businesses a tax break than on protecting the lives of its most vulnerable citizens. There is a message in this budget that is frightening. A social message that heralds even more Corporate Welfare in the form of unconditional tax breaks for businesses while diminishing money for seniors, cancer research, stem cell research, charity health care, and human services. A message that those who can least afford it, are punished with less and expected to do more, while those that are affluent, are rewarded with more to do even less. It is a calamity of ideology, a disaster at the crossroads of decency and justice, and it begs for correction.

A key part of the Governor's budget calls for the elimination of the Department of Personnel. The Department of Personnel is the sole regulatory authority for employees of the State as well as local government employees who have not opted out of Civil Service. The notion that eliminating this body will somehow produce savings is another absurdity. Already, towns that have opted out have pension and personnel issues that ultimately hurt the employees. Without a regulatory authority, anarchy prevails. Privatizing the services, or as the Governor prefers to call it, "monetizing the staffing/services" has proven to be disastrous each and every time we have ventured down that path, whether it was the DMV, the State's Inspection Stations, or prison health care, corruption and cost overruns and contract adjustments of an upward nature were the rule, rather than the exception.

This budget endangers the lives of the mentally retarded and the mentally ill and erodes the livelihoods of those who provide the care to them. It punishes the elderly, the poor and the sick. It may be good for Wall St. and our credit rating, but it is more misery for Main St. and the REAL tax base of this state. Without a targeted reallocation of monies, and a dramatic change in ideology, it should not be passed.

Thank you for your consideration.

Submitted by:

Tom Bruno