

# THE BLADE

One of America's Great Newspapers

TOLEDO, OHIO THURSDAY, MAY 7, 2009

† THE BLADE: TOLEDO, OHIO THURSDAY, MAY 7, 2009

STATE & FROM PAGE 1

toledoblade.com

SECTION A, PAGE 3

## New budget hole worries agencies

By JIM PROVANCE

BLADE COLUMBUS BUREAU CHIEF  
COLUMBUS — Representatives

of social service groups that saw some of their funding restored last week in a vote of House Democrats said yesterday they were "devastated" to learn it all could be wiped out with the opening of a new budget hole as wide as \$900 million.

"From everything we're hearing from the Senate, they have to make tough cuts. I wouldn't want to be them right now," said Laura Moskow Sigal, executive director of Mental Health America of Franklin County.

Mental health treatment clients and advocates rallied outside the Statehouse to preserve funding that was added to the next two-year budget last week by House Democrats. That was before the other shoe dropped for the current fiscal year.

The estimated hole of \$600 million to \$900 million, exacerbated by dismal income tax collections in April, would be enough to offset every penny added to the governor's budget by the House before sending the bill to the Republican-controlled Senate.

Gov. Ted Strickland yesterday said there was no intent to drop the latest budget problem in the laps of the Republican-controlled Senate after House Democrats were able to take credit for restoring funding for public libraries, food banks, child welfare and adult protective service, and other social service programs.

Senate President Bill Harris (R., Ashland) said the chamber is prepared to wield the ax to chop the budget even as it seeks to add dollars for charter schools.

"We're going to find it," he said. "I don't know at this point [where], but we're looking."

Both he and Mr. Strickland have taken tax hikes off the table as a possible solution to a problem that not only affects the current budget but will overflow into the next. Mr. Harris said the Senate is also not likely to turn away one-time federal stimulus dollars, but senators may have different opinions on how money should be spent so as not to set the state up for a tax hike two years from now to maintain that level of spending.

Toddie Moore, 49, of East Toledo, a client of the Mental Health and Recovery Services Board of Lucas County, was among those at the rally. Dealing with severe depression and bipolar disorder,

### Social service groups could lose recent gains

she has been a client for 8½ years. "We, who are already in recovery, are trying to figure out how to help people who are just beginning their recovery when all these things are being cut," she said.

The budget bill that passed along party lines in the House last week would fund mental health services in 2010 at \$485.4 million, down from the \$523.2 million originally budgeted for the current fiscal year. The lower House figure is still higher than Mr. Strickland proposed. In the second year of the next budget, 2011, the level of spending was to climb to \$495.4 million.

"There is no new programming," Lucas County board member Karen Durmiat-Suehrstedt said. "We've eliminated many of the supportive services down

to bare bones, so that we're left with just the ability to fund core treatment services. The irony in that is that treatment without the support services may be doomed to fail."

One of the last things House Democrats did before sending the next two-year budget to the Senate was to fully restore \$10 million in funding for public libraries that Mr. Strickland had proposed cutting in his budget on top of a 10 to 15 percent automatic cut driven by a formula tied to the shrinking general revenue fund.

"When the budget rises, we do well," said Clyde Scoles, director of the Toledo-Lucas County Public Library system. "When it doesn't, we live with the formula. We only ask that they leave the formula alone and allow it to work."

Contact Jim Provance at:  
jprovance@theblade.com  
or 614-221-0496.