

Advocates upset about cuts to services

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Grace has dealt with medical challenges since birth, including heart surgery and hearing loss. She also has sensory processing disorder, which Kitch said requires Grace to have familiar surroundings, established routines and therapy.

Personal care assistance allowed Grace to stay home and receive therapy while her parents work. Now that Grace is no longer eligible, they scrambled to find a child care center that could meet her needs.

“Some of the very services that have helped her make significant strides in the last 20 months in our home will soon be gone,” Kitch said.

Kitch spoke Saturday at a news conference sponsored by the Arc of West Central Minnesota. Families and advocates of people with disabilities expressed concerns about past and proposed cuts to services in Minnesota.

Gov. Tim Pawlenty has recommended \$347 million be cut from Health and Human Services in the next biennium.

Terry Atherton, program coordinator of Arc West Central with his wife, Donna, said he’s concerned by talk of removing dental care from the medical assistance package. He’d like to see reimbursement rates increased instead.

Steve Larson, public policy director for the Arc of Minnesota and co-chairman of the Minnesota Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities, said that since 2003, the state has tried to save millions on the backs of people with disabilities.

“Cuts in human services are a tax on our most vulnerable citizens,” Larson said, adding that previous and proposed cuts “can lead to serious medical or dental issues, place greater stress on families with children with disabilities and result in the loss of independence and greater isolation from the community.”

The Health and Human Services Finance Division Committee’s supplemental budget bill is expected to be released Wednesday with \$154 million in cuts, said Rep. Paul Marquart, who attended the conference along with Sen. Keith Langseth.

It’s hoped nearly \$700 million in federal funding will make further cuts unnecessary, Marquart said.

“A lot of times when we are looking at budgets, we look at numbers, and we don’t see people. I think that’s the problem down there,” Marquart said.

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