

## \$1.5M in cuts worries working families

Ingrid Giminez and her husband both work full time in the restaurant business, but their salaries are not enough to cover rent, household costs and day care for their 3-year-old son.

So, when Giminez learned she would lose a \$395 monthly subsidy from the county for day care, which covered a third of the bill, she did what she had to. She decided to pull her son out of day care and cut her work hours, although she fears it could mean losing her job.

"It's kind of hard when you are going to work and trying to study to give a better life to your kids," said the 30-year-old Port Chester resident, who is studying two nights a week to be a manicurist.

Altogether, 200 families have been told they will lose day-care "scholarships" from Westchester County, part of \$1.5 million in day-care spending that County Executive Rob Astorino has trimmed from the budget. Astorino has laid out \$16 million in budget cuts, including those to child care, to help the county cope with a large budget deficit and a troubled economy.

Child advocates, though, say it is critical to keep up day-care funding so parents can keep working and contribute to the growth of the economy. Early education is also a good investment, they say, because it helps children succeed later in life.

Westchester County legislators started the unique scholarship program in 2006 to aid working families who earn too much to qualify for state subsidies, but still struggle to pay for day care. For families, day-care bills are often the biggest

expense next to mortgage payments or rent, and annual tabs can run more than \$10,000 a year per child.

Families are awarded scholarships based on their income and family size. A family of three would have to earn between \$46,691 and \$56,029 to qualify for the award, which averages \$3,500 a year.

Even with the cuts, the county will spend \$33 million on day care this year, said Ned McCormack, Astorino's communications director and senior adviser. That is beyond what the county is required to do and shows the county's commitment to day care, he said.

"We all understand how important it is," McCormack said. "It's just a question of what kind of actions can we take to make it more efficient, given our budget constraints."

Astorino estimated the county will face a \$166 million budget deficit next year and asked department heads to cut where possible.


Child advocates argue children's services should be the last to go.

Together with parents, they plan to protest the cuts to day-care programs at a meeting of the county Board of Legislators at 7 tonight.

Kathy Halas, executive director of the Child Care Council of Westchester, which administers the scholarships, said she is worried about the impact on working families.

Halas said families, many who have seen their wages go down or hours cut because of the economy, are already struggling.

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"We want people to be able to continue to work and these children to be in safe, reliable places," she said.

Cora Greenberg, executive director of the Westchester Children's Association, said the day-care scholarship was not a "sacred cow" but a smart investment. Research shows that early education helps children succeed in school and work and avoid costly intervention services later in life, she said.

"Investment in early education saves the taxpayer multiples of that amount within a short period of time and within the life of a child, so it's not good management to cut child care," she said.

For Jessica Yanqui, 21, of Ossining, the scholarship has helped pay for her 4-year-old to attend day care so she can go to college and work. It gives her peace of mind, she said, knowing her daughter is learning from trained, caring providers.

Yanqui, who is studying to be a teacher at Pace University, will graduate in May and wants to get a master's so she can get a teaching job and support her family.

The degree may have to wait, she said, because she is losing a scholarship of about \$225 a month.

"That has to be placed on hold now," she said, "because if I can't afford child care I have to sacrifice something."

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**NO, I have some rules!**

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