

Subsidy cuts worry working parents

MOUNT KISCO — Debbie Campos never imagined she'd need help from anyone, but now she's grateful for the day care help she gets from Westchester County.

Her appreciation, however, is turning into angst.

If the roughly \$500 subsidy is cut, she may have to stop working and go on welfare. And that's weighing heavily on Campos, a 44-year-old self-employed chef and mother of three whose 3-year old son attends the Mount Kisco Day Care Center.

"It allows you to work," said Campos, who is also going through a divorce. "What do you do? He's only three. I have two-and-half years before I'm thinking about kindergarten. ... I want to work. I don't want to sit around and collect benefits."

Campos was among several mothers who shared their stories Friday at the Mount Kisco Day Care Center when Democratic legislators and child care advocates stepped up criticisms of County Executive Rob Astorino's service cuts.

They again vowed to fight the cuts and explain what those changes actually mean to some families throughout the county, not simply in the cities and urban areas.

"This is the sort of thing that is a misplaced priority," said Legislator Bill Burton, D-Ossining. "Let's not start with the kids."

While many said they understood — some all too well — the difficult times governments are facing,

cutting child care was short-sighted and would affect so many other issues, they said.

Subsidized care helps people stay employed and helps break the cycle of poverty, they said.

Some providers said they'd have to lay off staff and close centers if something doesn't change.

Investing in children early-on produces tremendous social and financial dividends, said Cora Greenberg, executive director of the Westchester Children's Association. It also helps businesses in that it enables parents to go to work on a schedule while knowing their children are in a safe environment, she said.

Astorino proposed cutting \$5.8 million in social services this year including \$1.5 million in day care spending that slices dollars from three programs and raises contributions for families that get low-income subsidies.

The changes include raising fees to \$305, from \$228; freezing the number of households at 365 that get subsidies from a program known as Title XX; and eliminating scholarships for people who earn too much to qualify for the subsidy.

It's among \$16 million in savings they need to address a large looming deficit and expected declines in revenues.

These proposals have the least impact on services, the administration has said. Despite the cuts, the county would still spend \$33 million on day care programs and subsidies, they maintain.

Ned McCormack, communications director and senior adviser to Astorino said earlier in the week

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that the administration wants to work with leaders and service providers on ways to help save the system, because cuts are inevitable given the financial challenges of the county. These were put forth because they have the least impact on social services, he said.

Sharon Peura isn't so sure. The Pound Ridge resident said she relies on the roughly \$500 subsidy to help keep her 4-year-old daughter in day care.

Without it, the single mother said she would be lost since she is trying to rebuild her life after getting out of a shelter for domestic violence victims.

"I have to be OK for her to be OK," Peura said of her daughter. "To get a job, I needed child care. For me to have child care, it's big. I couldn't do it if I had to pay full price."

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