

Theresa Utton

Subject: FW: Budget cuts

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Date: Tue, 12 Aug 2014 20:20:24 +0000

Good afternoon Ms Kitchel:

I am writing to express deep concern over Governor Shumlin's proposed cuts to the Medicaid rate increase that designated agencies had been hoping for. I direct a program of Early Childhood Mental Health services here at the designated agency in Rutland, Rutland Mental Health. We have regular Medicaid services and we also manage the early childhood mental health services for Children's Integrated Services (CIS) along with DCF.

Our staff receive very low wages for the work they do. We hire folks with bachelor's and master's degrees to do extremely challenging work, with young vulnerable children and their families. Community mental health agencies work with the most challenging children and families and often those that cannot afford to pay. Families are struggling with drug abuse, homelessness, food security—and their young children, birth to six, bear the brunt of these struggles. Many of our professional level staff must take on second jobs to pay their basic bills, leaving them less resilient to handle the stresses of their primary case manager or clinician position.

Our agency is surrounded by other health care centers that regularly recruit our staff, offering them up to \$20,000 per year MORE for similar jobs. This is new. The federally qualified health centers for example, regularly recruit our seasoned staff. It takes one to two years to train a clinician to do quality mental health intervention; often just as they are capable of handling the more complex cases, they are recruited by a local health care facility that receives a federal subsidy to pay more per year. Just today, a bright and promising clinician gave her resignation to us, having been recruited by a local health care facility for a considerably higher salary. Designated agencies cannot compete for staff in this environment, and yet we must staff our programs so that vulnerable children receive the services they desperately need.

As small as the increase was supposed to be, staff were really looking forward to a tiny raise this fall, though they always knew it might not come through. *I urge you to follow through* on the commitment to raise salaries for direct service staff at the designated agencies through the Medicaid increase.

Thank you for your time.

Lauren Norford, LICSW
Coordinator, Early Childhood Services/CUPS
Rutland Mental Health