

Alabama Disabilities Advocacy Program Online News

February 15, 2012

State Budget News: Looming Cuts to Services for Persons with Disabilities

With a huge shortfall expected in the General Fund, the State of Alabama is facing critical decisions about how to provide essential services to its citizens. The Department of Mental Health is threatened with a [cut of 25%](#) in state funding, a reduction that would cost much more since this money is used as match for Medicaid dollars. One dollar in lost state funding equals about four dollars lost for services for people with disabilities!

Service providers have been told to expect cuts of 25 percent in the coming fiscal year, warns Murray Townsend, President of the Arc of Alabama and member of the ADAP's Developmental Disabilities Advisory Council. "This could destroy the mental health system in Alabama."

"Anything less than level funding for community providers will force many community service providers to close their doors." Townsend states. "The Governor and legislators [must act] to provide properly funded community programs." Dozens of disability organizations will join together in Montgomery [February 22](#) at the State House to speak to decision makers about the impact of proposed cuts on Alabama's children and adults who have disabilities.

Charter Schools and Children with Disabilities

Charter schools are a legislative priority issue for Governor Bentley.

What is a charter school? As described by the [National Council of State Legislatures](#), charter schools generally share three characteristics:

- They are public schools - free to attend, publicly funded, part of the state school system, and accountable to public bodies for their results.
- They are schools of choice, so they do not enroll students solely based on where they live.
- They are privately managed by an organization that has a charter, or contract, with an authorizer.

In a recently released issue [brief](#), the Council for Parent Attorneys and Advocates ([COPAA](#)) examines the extent to which students with disabilities are being served by the approximately 5000 publicly funded charter schools.

During the legislative session, ADAP will provide updates on charter school efforts and how the right of children with disabilities to a free appropriate public education is being protected.

New Emphasis on Employment for Alabamians with Developmental Disabilities

Following a national trend, the Alabama Department of Mental Health has [announced](#) it will phase out funding for sheltered workshops beginning October 1, 2012.

The National Disability Rights Network, of which ADAP is a member, published an in-depth [report](#) about sheltered workshops, segregated work sites, and low wages in 2011.

Federal Guidance Regarding Special Education

In January, the Office of Civil Rights sent a [letter](#) to educators nationwide offering new guidance regarding the way that school districts define what students should get special services under federal disability law. The letter says that the services offered may not be broad enough. The guidance likely will serve as a key for more students to be able to be evaluated for special services and accommodations.

New Leaders for ADAP Advisory Councils

The Alabama Disabilities Advocacy Program has two Advisory Councils, one for the advocacy program serving people with developmental disabilities (PADD) and one for the advocacy program serving people with mental illness (PAIMI). At separate meetings held on January 20, 2012, each council elected a new chair. Eloise Woods will Chair the PADD Advisory Council, and Greg Carlson will serve as Chair for the PAIMI Advisory Council. ADAP looks forward to working with Ms. Woods and Mr. Carlson and the Councils to advance the rights of persons with disabilities. Congratulations to the new leaders!

The University of Alabama

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