

Quad-Cities parents plead for continued state child care help

By Nicole Harris, nharris@qconline.com

MOLINE -- Local low-income families are angered by legislators' plans to significantly reduce subsidized child care options.

Warning that the funding slash would create a ripple effect, about 200 parents, child care providers and children rallied on Friday at Skip-A-Long's Moline campus.

Skip-A-Long CEO Laurie Walker said if lawmakers go through with "devastating budget cuts" and slash subsidized child care by 63 percent, less than 15 percent of 175,000 children in low-income families will continue receiving child care help.

"The tremendous progress made in Illinois in recent years to enable struggling working families to afford their child care co-pay and still go to work has been wiped out by the budget cuts," Ms. Walker said.

Rally participants were urged to contact lawmakers and ask them to stop the cuts set to take effect July 1.

Illinois law now allows families earning up to 200 percent of the federal poverty level -- \$29,140 for a family of two -- to receive subsidized child care and pay a reduced rate based on a sliding fee scale, if they can provide proof that they are working or attending school.

Under the proposed change, only families earning up to 50 percent of the federal poverty level -- \$7,285 for a family of two -- will be eligible for state help, Ms. Walker said. She noted the four Skip-A-Long campuses and 40 provider-homes serve about 900 area children; 75 percent of them benefit from the childcare funding.

The "Preschool For All" program in Rock Island County, which serves 660 children in 33



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Mar'Shell McElrath of Rock Island, left, talks about the having two children in day care and the hardships the states proposed budget cuts to child care will have on families with children that use day care. A rally of concerned parents in regards to the state proposed budget cuts to child care, was held at Skip-a-Long Child Development Center in Moline Friday afternoon. Standing in back with signs is Wendy Harmening of Moline whose family uses the Skip-a-Long facility and Susan Edstrand of Moline has grand children in day care.



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Jenny May of Moline, left, holds her 7 week old baby Mallory and Joyce May holds her granddaughter Maylee as they talk about the hardships the State of Illinois' proposed budget cuts to child care will have on families who use it. A rally of concerned parents gathered at the Skip-a-Long Child Development Center in Moline on Friday afternoon to protest the proposed budget cuts.

classrooms, also would lose funding if the cuts take place, Ms. Walker said.

Those attending Friday's rally were united in their stance that this proposal was not the way to fix the state's budget problems and allowing the reduction in child care assistance would decrease the quality of care children receive, limit or prohibit parents from working or continuing their education and put child care providers out of work.

"It will impact everybody," said Naomi Lincoln, the director of It's a Child's World in Silvis. "Everyone that deals with childcare, parents, teachers and children."

Ms. Lincoln said the bill currently awaits Gov. Pat Quinn's signature. She said she hopes he sends it back to legislators to find alternatives for working families. If not, Ms. Lincoln said, it's likely that children will be cared for by non-licensed providers or older siblings. Some will just be left at home alone, she said.

Michael Agok of Rock Island spoke at Friday's rally, saying he or his wife may have to quit working if they could no longer send their child to daycare. Mr. Agok said he is now in school and working hard to better his situation, adding that his education relies on the state child care subsidy.

"I'm doing my best," he said. If the cuts occur, he said, he may be forced to move his family to Iowa.

Moline resident Jenny May brought her 7-week-old twins, Mallory and Maylee, to Friday's rally, along with their grandmother Joyce May. The twins are on the waiting list for daycare; her 3-year-old son, Maverick, attends Skip-A-Long preschool.

If the child care funding is slashed, Ms. May said she must make some tough choices.

"I think I'm going to have to choose between feeding them and affording the daycare," she said. "I worry about my son falling behind because he can't stay in the preschool program."