

Fresno rally urges Gov. Jerry Brown to restore funds for health and human services

By Carmen George

Community advocates rallied in downtown Fresno on Friday to bring down the “wall of poverty,” urging Gov. Jerry Brown to restore funding to programs that boost health and human services. [Related story](#)

JOHN WALKER — THE FRESNO BEE

Community advocates gathered Friday in downtown Fresno to urge Gov. Jerry Brown to bring down the “wall of poverty” by restoring funds to programs that boost health and human services.

A rally attended by about 30 people and organized by the Health and Human Services Network of California was a response to the state budget proposal released by the governor Friday morning. The state is enjoying a second year of surplus and under the spending plan, the general fund will increase by about 5% from the current \$107.4 billion.

“The reason why we have this surplus in the first place is because since 2008, \$15 billion was taken out of health and human service programs,” said Rose Auguste, Northern California’s regional organizer for Health Access.

“Those are programs that help seniors, people with disabilities, children, working-class families, housing,” Auguste said. “So all of these programs were cut and now, ‘Yay, we don’t have the recession anymore,’ which is good, but it was done on the backs of working-class people and people who would like to enrich and better their lives.”

Marco Ocana, 20, who does health outreach with Fresno Barrios Unidos, said, “I don’t expect the government to see me as an equal, but I do expect him to see me as a human. I don’t expect him to know how it feels to not be able to tell my brother I can take him to the doctor, but I do expect him to try to help us. ...

“Why isn’t it a human right to be able to go to the doctor without worrying about being able to pay for rent, being able to provide food for your family? With my life I have dedicated myself to help my community, to help my neighbors, regardless of who they are.”

The Fresno rally was one of five across the state on Friday. Speakers called for a number of changes, including increases to the State Supplementary Payment Program that provides income support to people older than 65, expanding health care options for undocumented Californians, and increasing funding for subsidized child care.

Magdalena Gomez, regional coordinator for Tenants Together, called for restoring the renters’ rebate, a program eliminated by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger that provided millions in tax rebates to low-income elderly and disabled renters.

Debbie Reyes, Central Valley spokeswoman for Californians United for Responsible Budget, said the proposed state budget increases funding for the prison system by half a billion dollars, bringing total state corrections’ funding up to \$10.3 billion.

“What does that mean for us locally?” Reyes said. “It means that money has to come from somewhere — it’s got to come out of child care, it’s got to come out of Medicare, it’s got to come out of our communities, right here in a place where poverty is the highest in the country. ... Funding prisons and expanding jails in our local communities is a travesty, especially for children that need food, families that need jobs, people that need health care.”

Ocana focused on the emotional hardship of growing up without access to many services because he is undocumented.

“I remember when I was a child, how in my head I felt that tomorrow might be the last time I see my younger brother, tomorrow might be the last time I see my family — and it’s not right. Children of this generation are suffering mental illness, whether it’s not being able to go to the doctor or worrying about the gunshots they hear at night.

“It’s not a fair system. No one said it was perfect — but that’s the beauty of not being perfect, there’s always room for improvement.”

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