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Wayne County gets unfair cut

By *ROBERT A. FICANO*

Detroit and Wayne County residents are being unfairly targeted by the State of Michigan to bear more than a fair share of funding cuts for programs that serve those with mental illness, developmental disabilities, substance use disorders and serious emotional disturbance.

We all know times are tough. The poor economy is hitting Michigan very hard, and nearly everyone is being called upon to make sacrifices of some kind.

However, when it comes to state support for safety net services like mental health, the sacrifices should be fair and balanced. That is not the case with reductions that went into effect this month for the Detroit-Wayne County Community Mental Health Agency.

Gov. Jennifer Granholm's Executive Order 2009-22 called for a \$10-million cut in state general funds for mental health. In implementing the cut, the state Department of Community Health reduced Detroit-Wayne County by a disproportionate amount. If the \$10 million reduction had been spread equally across the state, Detroit-Wayne County would have lost about \$3.5 million, or a 12.5% reduction -- a hard amount to swallow, but a fair and equal sacrifice to make in these difficult times.

Instead, MDCH reduced Detroit-Wayne by \$4.4 million, or a cut of more than 15%.

With the cut expected to be permanent, residents receiving mental health services will lose about \$17.6 million worth of services. Some 40 providers delivering services were affected and have laid off staff, reduced services and revised programs. In Wayne County, we serve over 60,000 persons. The cuts primarily affect nearly 25,000 people who do not have Medicaid or other insurance.

If the state is robbing Peter to pay Paul, Wayne County is clearly Peter.

Even more disappointing, MDCH Director Janet Olszewski and Mental Health and Substance Abuse Administration Director Michael Head are characterizing the reduction as "funding equity" to make an excessive cut sound better. What "funding equity" really means is that Wayne County consumers are having their rightful dollars taken away. The agency and its board of directors have strongly opposed so-called funding equity because it forces our consumers to suffer an extra burden in balancing the entire state CMH budget.

The Legislature, MDCH and Gov. Granholm still have time to ensure that reductions are truly equal. All state CMH agencies serve people who are among the most vulnerable in our communities. By ending so-called "funding equity" and other actions, they can stop unjustly pitting residents with disabilities in one region against those in another.

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