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## State cuts devastating to Little City

Director says up to \$8 million of agency's budget is in jeopardy

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In more than 30 years of experience in human services and state government, Little City Foundation Executive Director Shawn Jeffers said he's never seen as careless and reckless a proposal as the state's budget.

Social services would be cut in half come July 1, crippling a 50-year-old Palatine organization that serves nearly 450 children and adults with disabilities and employs another 450 people, he said.

In total, the state's budget crisis has put up to \$8 million of Little City's \$22 million operating budget in jeopardy.

"I'm perturbed by the casualness of this," Jeffers

said. "The state is devaluing the people who need us the most."

This week, the Department of Children and Family Services informed Jeffers that funding for Little City's Children's Residential Program will be reduced by 50 percent. About 55 children with intellectual and development disabilities — most with autism — live in five homes. Some are wards of the state due to neglect or abuse.

"Do I serve half the people for half the year, give them half their medicine or what?" Jeffers said.

He also received notice from the Department of Human Services that other programs are being

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eliminated all together. Little City-supported foster parents, for example, could lose at least half their financial per diem and access to support services including mentoring, counseling and tutoring.

Jean Schonta, 43, is one of 80 adult residents who could lose subsidized campus apartments. Little City depends on more than \$1.5 million in state grants to fund programs like the Supported Living Arrangement. Palatine resident Beatrice Schonta said her daughter, who has Asperger syndrome, thrives living on her own at Little City. She works in the design studio and teaches a weaving class.

"Having to leave would absolutely destroy Jeanie," Beatrice said. "She's happy where she is because she's independent and gets to use her talents."

Jeffers won't speculate or draft contingency plans because he's hoping the state legislature will address the

budget crisis in a way that reduces the impact on social service programs like his.

"We won't know the magnitude of this until the storm passes," he said.

But he said he's angry that people with disabilities are being put up as collateral to push legislators to impose a tax increase. "It's not a matter of choosing between them or a tax increase. It's not that black and white," he said. "It's about the state of Illinois deciding what its priorities are."

State Sen. Matt Murphy said Gov. Pat Quinn is creating "polar extremes between the biggest tax hike in state history or gutting programs for the most vulnerable people. It's a false choice."

Murphy, a Palatine Republican, said the budget can be balanced without raising taxes and without cutting funding to organizations like Little City. For starters, he said, there can't be any new programs or expansion of existing programs.