

Youth aid bureaus reprieved

Governor promises to provide funding

By Peter Jensen
Sun Staff Correspondent

ANNAPOLIS — Like a tardy Santa Claus, Gov. William Donald Schaefer dropped off a gift at a Glen Burnie shopping mall yesterday afternoon — a pledge to keep open the 22 Youth Service Bureaus scheduled to be axed from the budget Feb. 1.

After a tour of the Harundale Youth & Family Service Center at the Harundale Mall, Mr. Schaefer said he would find the money "somewhere in the budget" to keep the counseling and recreation centers open.

"I'm going to find the money," the governor announced after meeting with social workers and former clients at the 22-year-old Anne Arundel County facility. "I'm going to save the program. You can bet on it."

His announcement marked the second time in three days that he has come to the rescue of a program his staff had cut in order to trim a projected \$423 million state deficit.

The Department of Juvenile Services announced last week its intention to cut off funding for the youth services program. Since the state pays for about 75 percent of the cost of operating the centers, officials expected at least 17 of them to close Feb. 1. The move was projected to save \$1 million from the current budget and \$2.5 million in the next fiscal year.

But state juvenile services officials said the decision also spurred "hundreds" of phone calls, letters and petitions from the program's supporters. Proponents argued that the bureaus were not only useful but also cost-effective.

The youth centers offer family counseling, tutoring, recreation, job and teen pregnancy programs. They can potentially head off problems before the youngsters become a far greater financial burden on the state, supporters argued.

"There are some things we fund that aren't effective. This is something where if you get in early you can really make a difference," said Susan Leviton, president of Advocates for Children and Youth, who applauded the governor's decision.

The governor met with several former Harundale clients, including DeShonta Contee, 22, of Crownsville, who came to the center five years ago with eating disorders that threatened her life. At the time, the 5-foot 3-inch Arundel Senior High School student weighed just 85 pounds.

"If it hadn't been for the center, I probably wouldn't be alive today," Ms. Contee said. "This center means a lot. Closing it would mean a lot of people don't get help," she added.

Stephen Hartman, a family therapist and social worker at Harundale, said that hearing last week that the facility might close in two months

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Schaefer pledges to find funds to save youth bureaus

SCHAEFER, from 1D

was a "devastating experience" for some of his clients.

"I don't know where some of these people would go to" if the center closed, he said.

The program's supporters had also argued that local jurisdictions would never be able to make up the lost state funding. Baltimore, for instance, has the biggest population of poor children but the least ability to pay for youth programs.

While the youth service program

"If it hadn't been for the center, I probably wouldn't be alive today."

DESHONTA CONTEE

is a relatively small item in the \$11.7 billion state budget, the governor's recent gyrations over whether to keep or cut popular state programs would appear to make his deficit-trimming job tougher.

After considerable lobbying on

the part of kidney disease patients, he announced Monday his intention to restore funding to two medical assistance programs that help pay for kidney dialysis and help the poor defray the cost of medication.

The decision to extend the two

health department programs to the end of June is expected to cost \$6 million, which state officials expect the federal government ultimately to pay and which will require General Assembly approval.

The governor insisted yesterday that the abrupt change in policy should not be characterized as a "reversal."

Critics who claim the state wastes taxpayer money should realize a significant amount "goes to help kids" and other much-needed programs, he said.

Hayden appoints committees to study taxes and spending

HAYDEN, from 1D

time advocate of reducing the reliance on the property tax.

Both groups include a cross section of attorneys, accountants, merchants and representatives of senior citizen and taxpayer groups.

Other members of the tax equity committee are James Boyer, Bryson L. Cook, Margaret M. Davis, Baltimore County Finance Director James R. Gibson, Carl Julio, Harold

Lloyd, Alfred G. Matthews, Richard Pulse and George Towle.

The costs committee includes Lee E. Coplan, Albert R. Counselman, Judith T. Eriker, Jerry Kelly, James L. Layman, David Rhodes, G. Thomas Welzenbach, Carl A. J. Wright and Albert M. Zawodny.

John O'Neill Sr., a leader in the efforts during last fall's election to place a cap on increase in property tax revenues, will serve as vice chairman.

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