

Alameda County wants residents to understand how cuts will affect them and do something about it

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Despite record foreclosure rates, double-digit unemployment and historic rates of poverty among children, it can be easy to gloss over how cuts to social programs affect people in Alameda County. That is why District 3 Supervisor Wilma Chan is holding a budget hearing Wednesday evening: To discuss the precarious state of safety net services imperiled by state and federal funding cuts.

"We are trying to get people to understand what's happening with the county budget," Chan said. "When we talk about the numbers, people don't get what's happening."

If they know what's at stake, she said, they can become "active advocates" by opposing the cuts or coming up with alternatives.

Elected officials in the past have predicted devastating consequences that failed to materialize.

But already the county has had to close deficits totaling half a billion dollars in three years. Realignment of state-funded program to county responsibility has increased the burden even as demand for services increases. The reality is dire, Chan said. If the state moves forward with more cuts to programs such as Medical, adult day health care, CalWORKS and child care, there is no way the county can make up for it. she said.

And, Chan added, the state won't be able to compensate for the people who lose services because of changes by the state to eligibility requirements.

"So there's a real impact on these people," she said.

The Hong Fook center in Oakland, for example, is one of the county's seven Adult Day Health Care facilities that provide high-risk seniors everything from skilled nursing to hot meals and social workers. Some rely on the center for their safety during the day because their children are at work, others have no family. They would have no place to go without the centers, Chan said.

The county is already scrambling to cover 450 residents dependent on Adult Day Health Care who will be ineligible under Gov. Jerry Brown's proposed 2012-13 budget. Even more cuts are on the horizon even as the numbers of seniors in Alameda County continues to expand beyond the current 11 percent of the population and are expected to double by 2020.

Meanwhile, Chan said, the demand at the Alameda County Community Food Bank Emergency food hot line has tripled to more than 36,000 annually in the past five years.

Even families where both adults work in professional level jobs are relying on the food bank because they can't afford groceries and rent.

The county also is at risk of losing \$34 million used to help low-income families afford child care and tighten rules that would, for example, cap annual parent income eligibility at \$37,060 for a family of three.

Currently the maximum is \$42,216.