

## Budget impasse hits home for child care center

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**(08-18) 20:08 PDT** -- Kathy Sapp, who operates a state-funded day care center in her East Oakland home, has been running on fumes since the state Department of Education - its purse strings tied because of the budget impasse - stopped paying her and hundreds of other child care providers in California in early June.

To trim costs as she waits for her \$4,000 monthly payments, she has stopped taking field trips to restaurants, has reduced the kids' milk portions and sometimes uses beans instead of meat. She's dipping into her savings, but she might have to take out a loan to cover groceries, her mortgage, her utility bills and her insurance if the 50-day stalemate drags on much longer.

"You have to scale back on everything in order to make ends meet," said Sapp, 56, an in-home care provider for 15 years who is licensed to care for eight children.

On Monday afternoon, three preschoolers she is caring for woke from a nap after a trip to the library and ate a snack of cheese sandwiches, apple juice and bananas.

Dozens of child care centers in the Bay Area and hundreds across the state are feeling the same pain because of the state budget deadlock, putting half a million children statewide at risk of losing care.

Licensed day care centers aren't the only state services hit by the fiscal crunch: Money has been withheld from K-12 special education programs, adult day centers and low-income college students.

On Monday, a day after the state Assembly defeated a spending plan backed by Democrats, there was little public discussion of the budget at the Capitol. Lawmakers debated and voted on bills unrelated to the state budget.

"Some of these child care centers are precariously close to closing their doors," state Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell said in an interview Monday. "If parents can't have their children safely in day care, then some may not be able to go to work. It could really have a ripple effect on the economy. We need to have a budget, and it has to be good for kids."

Sapp gets frustrated when she hears news reports that the Legislature again has failed to agree on the budget, which was supposed to be enacted by July 1. She scrimped to keep her doors open through last year's 55-day budget impasse.

This year, she is applying lessons from that experience: She paid the bills she could afford ahead of time. And she socked away some savings, but that is quickly disappearing.

"We put these people in office," she said of the state's elected leaders. "It's really sad they can't pass the budget. They're getting their salaries and benefits and continuing to collect our taxes. It's like a kick in the face."

Bay Area child care experts say hundreds, maybe thousands, of families in the region could go without day care if a budget isn't adopted soon.

"How long can providers hold out?" said Renee Herzfeld, executive director of the Community Child Care Coordinating Council (4C's) of Alameda County, a referral agency contracted with the state to assist low-income parents with child care costs.

"Everything that's not happening in Sacramento trickles down to thousands of people anxiously waiting for the state to make up its mind to pay for services they contracted for. Everybody's costs continue. ... Do we have to wait for disaster before we act?"

Sapp knows all too well the grim reality ahead if leaders don't act.

"It's very stressful," she said. "You lie down at night and pray and hope for things to happen. In another month or so, it's going to get really ugly. It's not going to be good for the kids."

## Where to help

These agencies are accepting donations:

**San Francisco:** Wu Yee Children's Services, (415) 391-4721; Children's Council of San Francisco, (415) 276-2900.

**Alameda County:** 4C's of Alameda County, (510) 582-2182; Bananas, (510) 658-7353; Child Care Links, (925) 417-8733.

**Contra Costa County:** Contra Costa Child Care Council, (925) 676-5442.

**Marin County:** Marin Child Care Council, (415) 472-1092.

**San Mateo County:** Child Care Coordinating Council of San Mateo County, (650) 655-6770.

## Child care funding drought

How the budget deadlock is affecting child care providers:

**Who's at risk:** 792 agencies are not being paid, and 500,000 children are at risk of losing care

**Impact on child care centers:** Fewer snacks, fewer outings

Source: California Department of Education

## Budget deadlock: what won't get paid

Here's how much money other state programs will not be paid this month until a state budget is approved:

**\$1.3 billion:** K-12 classroom programs, including special education.

**\$584 million:** Medi-Cal payments to programs, including adult day centers, assisted-living centers, rural hospitals and clinics.

**\$434 million:** Community college operations, including classroom supplies and campus maintenance.

**\$95 million:** Transportation projects, from new roads to pothole repairs.

**\$50 million:** Cal Grants to low-income students for tuition and expenses at colleges and technical schools in the state. UC and CSU campuses will carry expenses for those students until the grants are issued.

Source: Office of the State Controller

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<http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2008/08/19/MNBH12DCV7.DTL>

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