

Budget Numbers Don't Add Up For Montana's Children

March 22, 2011



Montana's 62nd Legislature is now twelve weeks into the session, and the proposed state budget has passed from the House, Senate Finance and Claims, and is scheduled to be heard on the Senate floor as early as next week. This preliminary budget includes unnecessary and harmful cuts that jeopardize the quality of schools, place our seniors' health care at risk, and cause long-term harm to our vital public services. Unfortunately, the proposed cuts also stand to endanger the future of Montana's greatest asset—our children. Over \$130 million of the cuts directly impact Montana's children. The following table outlines the proposed cuts by categories and programs.

Table 1: Proposed Cuts Impacting Montana's Children	
Program	Proposed Cut
<i>Health and Human Services (\$95,626,855)</i>	
SNAP (formerly Food Stamps)	\$ 34,999,912*
Healthy Montana Kids	\$ 26,102,327
Tobacco Use Prevention Programs	\$ 15,047,343
Low Income Energy Assistance	\$ 9,606,510*
Family Planning and Preventative Health	\$ 5,681,272*
Temporary Assistance to Needy Families	\$ 2,915,749*
Women, Infants and Children	\$ 600,000*
Montana Developmental Center – Boulder	\$ 465,205
Autism Group Home - Bozeman	\$ 84,676
Big Brothers Big Sisters	\$ 80,012
Overtime/Holiday Pay for Child Protective Workers	\$ 43,849
<i>K-12 Education (\$3,861,775)</i>	
Special Education	\$2,681,398
School Block Grants	\$420,458
Audiology Services	\$66,191
Other- Office of Public Instruction	\$693,728
<i>Higher Education (\$32,296,899)</i>	
University System Funding	\$15,023,208
Other- Higher Education	\$13,332,664
Community Colleges	\$2,289,833
Dual Enrollment (high school students in college courses)	\$500,000
Quality Educator Loan Forgiveness	\$478,196
Tribal College Assistance (for non-tribal members)	\$458,998
Post-Secondary Scholarship Program	\$214,000
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Table 1 Continued: Proposed Cuts Impacting Montana's Children	
Program	Proposed Cut
School for the Deaf and Blind (\$68,986)	
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Judicial Branch (\$319,154)	
Youth Courts	\$157,782
Guardians Ad Litem (child abuse and neglect cases)	\$90,320
Family Evaluators (contested custody cases)	\$71,052
<i>*These items include the rejection of over \$52 million in purely federal funds that do not require state matching funds.</i>	

In Montana, one in every five children lives in poverty, and 28% of children under five live in poverty.¹ The Legislature's proposed cuts threaten to increase the suffering of Montana's most vulnerable children. Moreover, the proposed budget would greatly compromise the segment of our population that is critical to our future success and economic prosperity.

A quality education lays the foundation for success for both Montana's children and the state as a whole. However, funding for both the state's K-12 schools and higher education system has been cut. Almost \$4 million in cuts to K-12 schools and over \$32 million in cuts to higher education institutions all across this state have been proposed. In addition, the bulk of the K-12 education funding that has been restored remains contingent on the passage of a handful of other bills. These programs educate Montana's next generation of qualified workers and leaders. A lack of investment in an educated workforce deters business growth and compromises the state's chance for economic prosperity.

Refusal of federal funds for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) and SNAP (formerly food stamps) programs will cause further harm to Montana's youngest residents. For too many children across the state, nutrition assistance programs are their only means of receiving adequate nutrition. Hunger compromises a child's ability to learn and grow, and malnutrition compromises the health and safety of Montana's youth and increases the chance of more expensive and complicated medical problems in the future. Unfortunately, the health of many of these children is dependent upon coverage received from Healthy Montana Kids, the state's children's health insurance program. To date, Healthy Montana Kids has been cut by \$26 million.

Regrettably, the Legislature's proposed budget will cause the greatest suffering to Montana's most vulnerable children. Reductions to holiday and overtime pay for child protective workers could put the state's children at greater risk of abuse and assault, and proposed cuts to the School for the Deaf and Blind and the Autism Group Home threaten quality services for children living with serious disabilities.

The Legislature has even proposed turning away over \$52 million in federal funds that require no state spending. This short-sighted refusal will drastically limit services that low-income families rely on to make ends meet, including the Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LIEAP), SNAP (formerly Food Stamps), and Women, Infants and Children (WIC). As a result, children and families across the state will suffer, and millions of dollars will be pulled from Montana's economy at a critical point in the state's economic recovery.

Numbers at a Glance

15,333 - Children benefiting from Women, Infants and Children

52,598 - Children on SNAP

82,919 - Children enrolled in Healthy Montana Kids

*Source - Montana Department of Health and Human Services

The Legislature has clear options. Currently, legislators are crafting a budget using outdated, pessimistic revenue estimates. Montana's economy is recovering, and both the governor's office and the Legislature's non-partisan staff project that state revenues will increase. Legislators can choose to adopt a cautiously optimistic, up-to-date revenue estimate that is indicative of Montana's recovery and will allow them to restore funding for the proposed cuts.

As the final budget decisions are made, Montana's elected officials must look forward to the day that children in communities across the state will be our leaders- the governors, legislators, firefighters, and doctors- of our state. No child can achieve greatness without a quality education, and a healthy, nurturing environment in which to thrive. Montana's future will only be as great as its investment in our children.

1. Kids Count Data Center. Montana State Profile. <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/bystate/stateprofile.aspx?state=MT&loc=28>