



Mental health organizations to rally Monday to protest budget cuts

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Mental health and medical organizations across central Alabama plan to rally Monday, May 11, to protest and discuss proposed budget cuts that could devastate programs for Alabamians with developmental and intellectual disabilities.

Proposed budget cuts that could reduce the Mental Health General Fund's **appropriation by up to \$35 million** would also affect programs for people with mental health diagnoses. In reality, the state funding cuts could trigger a difference of about **\$100 million due to federal matching funds**.

Greg Woods, development coordinator at the Arc of Tuscaloosa County, said the cuts will be felt by the by a wide range of people and the "community at large" if they are allowed to happen.

"Services which allow successful community living for persons with intellectual disabilities, serious mental illnesses, emotionally disturbed children and adolescents and people with substance abuse diagnoses could be impacted or eliminated by these cuts," Woods said.

The cuts would affect programs like the Arc of Tuscaloosa County and of Jefferson County, organizations that serves Alabamians with intellectual and developmental disabilities by offering prevocational training, education and living skills training.

Alabama has shuttered most institutional care facilities over the past decade, relying instead on community-based care found at organizations like the Arc. Individuals who previously lived full-time at institutions like Partlow now live in group homes.

In Tuscaloosa, at least five organizations who provide day or residential services to community members will be affected: The Arc of Tuscaloosa County, Indian Rivers Mental Health Centers, Eagle's Wings of Tuscaloosa, UCP of West Alabama and the Ability Alliance of West Alabama.

Chris Stewart, CEO of the Arc of Jefferson County, said ninety percent of the people they serve have nowhere else to go.

If funds are cut, patients might be forced into nursing homes.

"If this budget or anything close to it passes, it will dismantle Alabama's community-based systems of care for

people with mental illness and intellectual disabilities," Reddoch said. "There are no state hospitals left to cut."

Cuts could also affect employees of these organizations.

Central Alabama rallies Monday will include:

Gadsden: 2 p.m. Monday at Gadsden Convention Hall

Tuscaloosa: 11 a.m. Monday at Snow Hinton Park

Birmingham: 10:30 a.m. at Kelly Ingram Park

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