

## **Valley Childcare Threatened by Proposed State Budget Cuts**

By Eddie Jimenez / The Fresno Bee

Gov. Jerry Brown's proposed budget cuts to child care would devastate Valley low-income families who would have to quit their jobs or rely on older children to care for younger siblings, Fresno area officials said Friday.

The cuts would force agencies that provide child care and preschool programs to scale back services, authorities said.

"It's a ripple effect that nobody wants to absorb, but if you only have so much money, you can only serve so many kids," said Tony Silva, associate executive director of I-5 Social Services Corporation.

The nonprofit organization based in Fresno cares for children from infancy to age 5 at centers in Cantua Creek, Del Rey, Huron, Firebaugh, Huron, Kerman, Madera, Mendota and Selma.

Agencies that operate child-care and preschool programs won't know the magnitude of the proposed cuts until next week, authorities said.

However, funds for the more than 250 Fresno County programs that provide subsidized child care and preschooling could be cut by 25%, said Wilma Hashimoto, associate director of Early Care and Education for the Fresno County Office of Education.

In 2008, the programs served 19,000 children in the county. That number could drop to 12,000 with the proposed cuts, she said.

The hardship would be the greatest on families in outlying communities, Hashimoto said. "Many of them live in rural areas where access to quality child care is limited," she said.

The proposed cuts would hit programs that not only provide child care for toddlers but much-needed preschool for 3- to 5-year-olds, authorities said.

"The children will be losing the educational skills needed to succeed," said Luis Santana, executive director of Reading and Beyond, a nonprofit that provides a wide range of services to low-income families in Fresno and Madera counties.

A lack of preschool puts some children on the road to failure, causing them to repeat grades, need more special services in schools and possibly wind up in prison, authorities said.

The proposed state budget cuts would harm families who are barely making ends meet, Silva said.

"In all of our centers," he said, "we're serving the poorest of the poor."

