

CALIFORNIA

Child Care Providers Urge State To End Budget Impasse

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Staff Reporter

Owed millions of dollars and tired of an unprecedented budget delay, an area education group and the State Superintendent for Public Instruction held a press conference Thursday to publicly implore the governor and the California Legislature to pass a fair budget so child care providers can collect funds.

As of Friday, it has been a record 92 days since the deadline for the official state budget passed. Without a set amount of appropriations, child care providers have received absolutely no funds since July.

Para Los Niños, a Los Angeles non-profit organization that runs 23 education programs aimed at kids and families living in poverty, partnered with State Superintendent for Public Instruction Jack O'Connell to hold a press conference to give different members of the community a chance to speak out in support of a budget agreement.

"I'm here to urge the governor and our friends in the legislature to resolve this historic budget impasse," O'Connell said before a small crowd at the Para Los Niños Family Learning Complex in Downtown L.A. "The absence of a state budget has significantly, adversely impacted many, many programs and many, many individuals. Children are losing learning opportunities that can never be made up."

Because of the lack of funds resulting from the budget delay, at least 25 child care centers have been forced to close since July 1.

Tanya McMillan, a licensed home-based child care provider from Bellflower, Calif., spoke at the conference Thursday to share her story of trying to make ends meet without reimbursement by the state.

"Because of the budget delay, I have been forced to give letters out to my parents to inform them that if the budget isn't signed, I'm going to have to shut my doors," she said. "This is one of the hardest decisions I have ever made in my entire life."

McMillan added that she has not been paid since July 1 and has two teenagers of her own she needs to worry about and support on top of the eleven children she regularly serves.

Para Los Niños is supposed to operate on a \$28 million budget, but as of Oct. 1, the state of California will have owed the organization about \$4.7 million. President and CEO of Para Los Niños Gisselle Acevedo opened the press conference Thursday, detailing the ways the organization has been able to stay afloat.

"In order to survive, we have depleted our reserves, we have drawn down lines of credit and we are deferring payments to our vendors," she said. "And let me tell you, they are not very happy."

Although Para Los Niños has been able to stay open because they are larger, officials stress they are "on the brink."

"Many service providers that are smaller than us that are making decisions about what type of food they can serve the child and whether to use air conditioning on a hot day," said Elena Stern, vice president of communications. "These are real people in dire straits."

As the days continue to pass without an operating budget, O'Connell stressed the potential economic ramifications that could last for a generation. So far, 1,141 people adults who have been serving children have been laid off. Of these people, many do not return to profession or leave the state to continue to work in the field, which cuts into potential tax revenue at the state and local level. Altogether, O'Connell cited a labor study that showed a potential loss of \$3.1 billion in economic output.

California state PTA president Jo Loss closed by not only demanding a budget, but a fair one at that. Compromises will have to be made whenever the budget is finally passed, and with schools already losing libraries and arts and music, Loss fears education will continue to take the brunt of cuts.

"We need the governor and legislature to know and recognize our children only have one chance of childhood... and this is it," she said. "We want the right budget, one that reflects California's values. We hold their future in our hands and they hold our state's future in their hands."



State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell speaks out against budget impasse. (Chryst'l Sanchez)

Staff reporter Helen Tobin contributed to this report.