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Human Service Programs Affected by Governor Budget Cuts

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Dozens of service providers took their case to the State Capitol Wednesday morning.

They are opposed to budget cuts suggested by the Governor.

Their first stop was the Governor's office.

They call themselves Phocused which stands for Protecting Hawaii's Ohana, Children, Under-served, Elderly and Disabled.

The Governor has proposed what they consider radical program and budget cuts that will severely impact human services.

"The Healthy Start program is of concern to me because it is a very well known program, been modeled across the country for its effectiveness in preventing child abuse and neglect," said Susan Chandler of Phocused.

The governor was not available, so the group crossed to the Lt. Governor's office.

He wasn't available either.

The administration has called for a reduction in services for people with mental health problems.

Chandler adds, "We certainly don't want to see them go back into the state hospital. The services are to keep them out of the hospital and provide really essential life-coaching and services so they can stay and live a quality of life outside the institution."

And it isn't just the patients who would be affected.

Greg Payton, of Mental Health Kokua said, "You have many adults who would automatically be homeless, you have a disruption in behavioral health care and you have staff who would be without jobs. This doesn't impact just one thing, it's many layers of our economy."

There are a number of agencies providing services to families in need - many of those agencies are looking at drastic cutbacks.

"We're having to service them with a decreased staff over and over again and then we have to get rid of a lot of our families because there's no money to support the positions and that's really, really hard to be getting rid of so many families in a short period of time," said Service Provider, Robin Arndt.

As they made their way to legislators' offices, former Human Services Director Susan Chandler also expressed concern about a cut to General Assistance for the disabled.

"So they can't go into work, the idea isn't that there going to be going to work, they need support and to cut their dollars in half just seems unconscionable," said Chandler.

Phocused has suggested changes in the tax code to raise needed revenue.