New California Budget Slashes $55.5 Million From AIDS Funds

May 27, 2009

On May 26, California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger released his plan to cut $5.5 billion through June 2010 from the state budget to help close its budget gap, which currently stands at $24.3 billion, the *San Francisco Chronicle* reports. The budget includes cuts to California's AIDS drug assistance program (ADAP) and other programs overseen by the state Office of AIDS.

According to the article, the proposed budget would reduce the state's Office of AIDS programs by $55.5 million, affecting the 35,000 low-income HIV-positive Californians who receive treatment through ADAP.

"We were expecting cuts, but this is much, much worse than what we were expecting," said Courtney Mulhern-Pearson, policy and legislative associate for the San Francisco AIDS Foundation.

The proposed cuts come after California voters rejected five of six ballot measures that would alleviate the deficit, including borrowing from Wall Street. Schwarzenegger said the message from voters was that they would rather see the budget balanced through budget cuts as opposed to borrowing or raising taxes.

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