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## Summary

Money for mental health programs may take a hit in the legislature.

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## Comments

Robert Ramsey perfectly reflects the legislature's utter cluelessness about the Department of Mental Health budget cuts. The real net cut to the Department's budget is 22% due in large part to TennCare, sitting on its self-congratulatory surplus, cutting out any support of emergency crisis services for any of the 1 in 5 Tennesseans who aren't fortunate enough to be on TennCare or private insurance.

Compare MHDD's 22% cut to the average 8 - 9% cut of all departments in state government. We house more than twice the number of individuals with severe mental illness in our state prisons and county jails than we do in our state mental health institutes. The vast majority are in for misdemeanor and lower-class non-violent felony convictions.

Rep. Ramsey doesn't get it: it is precisely those "small programs" that deliver the most bang for the buck in direct services to the mentally ill. State dollars for programs are just like waiting on Bessie's gallon jar of fresh milk to settle so you can separate out the top for butter. All that skim milk underneath is nothing but the dollars that support the bureaucratic infrastructure (\$.81 of every tax dollar) of state government that supposedly oversees these programs - the butter - that actually deliver the services that make a difference.

"Private sector programs" - Representative Ramsey, where do you think the funds were coming from to provide these service? The Department's budget!

So the end result, due to the Legislature's six-year capitulation on virtually all budgetary matters to a governor unapologetically indifferent to the challenges of the mentally ill, is a dangerous dismantling of what remaining semblance of a safety net existed. With the Governor's 2009 - 10 budget for mental health services, there is no net.

Until the Legislature steps up to their responsibility to act in the best interests of ALL the citizens of Tennessee, we will continue to see social and FISCAL mismanagement.

-- Posted by **Will Manning** on Fri, Apr 17, 2009, 12:00 pm EDT ([Report this](#))

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# State mental health budget may be slashed

By Joel Davis  
of The Daily Times Staff  
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Some services for the mentally ill may be cut from the proposed 2009-2010 state budget,

The Tennessee General Assembly is working with the administration on the budget. State Rep. Robert Ramsey, R-Maryville, said that the proposed budget slashes mental health spending.

"We've had a big (proposed) cut in the mental health budget ... \$37 million," Ramsey said. "That's mainly for the small programs. If people still need mental health support, there is a capacity for the state to direct them to private sector programs. There is still care for the individuals."

Pamela Greider, who is a facilitator with the National Alliance on Mental Illness in Blount County, said this will hurt local residents.

"It's going to cost us, all the people, a lot more money because the proper things that should be in place aren't in place any more. The bottom is being dropped out. The end result of this is naturally there is going to be a lot less care provided for people who are very, very ill.

In other legislative business, Ramsey has been seeing a variety of bills pass through committee.

"I have a limited world view because of the committees I'm on," he said. "We've had a lot of local applications for premier resort status, lots of alcohol bills have come through ... we had two that were taken off notice so they probably won't be heard this year. We have three clean water bills that haven't caused much controversy, but those are coming through the environmental committee. I don't know the status of those at the moment.

"We have the education committee with the school starting date that was

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supposed to be heard (Wednesday) morning, but I've been informed that (the starting date) probably won't be changed, so it would be up to the discretion of the school systems.

"We have had three cable bills to allow municipalities to enter into the cable television business. Those have been postponed. There may be an inclination of the legislature to include those under the Tennessee Regulatory Commission. We've had several bills on constables. There are apparently still 18 counties that still have constables, and (bill sponsors are) asking for 40 hours of training per year."

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