

Massachusetts residents react to budget cuts

“People depend on these government programs just to sustain life”

Kate Randall
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The Massachusetts Senate has released its version of the state budget for fiscal year 2012. Like the plans proposed by Democratic Governor Deval Patrick and the state House, the Senate proposal is an assault on essential social programs for working people.

The \$30.5 billion plan presented by the state Senate—which, like the House, is dominated by the Democratic Party—seeks to plug a \$1.9 billion budget deficit by underfunding MassHealth, the state Medicaid program, by \$750 million and cutting \$7.9 million in direct benefits to the poor.

WIC, the Women, Infants and Children program, faces a \$2.7 million cut—some 17 percent. The program currently provides nutritional support for more than 130,000 pregnant women, mothers, infants and children up to age five. Thousands of children on welfare would see their yearly clothing allowance slashed from an already miserly \$150 to \$40.

The Senate Ways and Means Committee budget proposal includes the provision that allows cities and towns to rip up existing unions contracts and force municipal workers into cut-rate health plans (see “Massachusetts: Democrats attack municipal workers’ health care”). While aid to local government is to be cut by \$65 million, no new taxes would be levied on big business.

In the Dorchester neighborhood of Boston on Saturday, people reacted to news of the budget cuts. “I think it’s one of the most abominable things they could do,” Anneeda Waiters told the *World Socialist Web Site*. “In this economic time, people are unemployed and they depend on these government programs just to sustain life.

“Like when you go to the dentist and you’ve got a

toothache. They’re cutting out so much stuff people like me can’t even get teeth. I’m going to have to get all new teeth. I have a digestion problem already, and without teeth, it’s going to be worse. On MassHealth now, they’ll pull your teeth out, but they won’t replace them.

“Last year, I actually had to take MassHealth to Superior Court to get my dental benefits. If you’ve over 21, you get cleanings, extractions, and one-time X-rays. That’s it. No cosmetics, no fixing, no dentures, no nothing. I worked a total of 28-29 years, so I’ve been paying taxes a long time. Then I have to sue them, take them to court to give me some teeth.

“For the last 17 years of my career, I worked at Mass General Hospital. I’m a medical assistant/lab tech. So I’ve been paying taxes for years and years and now that I’m unable to work, I have to fight like hell to get plain, normal benefits that people need just to sustain life.

“Right now, I have three or four chronic illnesses. If it wasn’t for me having worked and being able to get disability, I’d be up the creek. I get \$88 of food stamps a month—are you serious? And they just cut it to \$78. So I get food stamps and the disability check, but I have to pay rent, lights, gas, my co-payments on my medication. I get a total of about \$900 a month.”

Asked what she thought about the Democrats proposing the cutbacks, Anneeda told us, “There should be more community input, there should more of the little people’s input into these decisions.

“I’ve always voted Democrat, but I don’t think the party name really makes a difference anymore. It’s their platform. And they don’t begin from the interest of the working people.”

Myra Rose-Smith has already seen a reduction in her income due to cuts in state spending. “They cut my Social Security check by \$80,” she said, “because the state is not paying as much as they used to into disability. My check’s gone from \$140-something down to \$60 a month. My total income is now \$724 and it used to be \$808. And I have \$45 a month in medicine I have to pay for.

“I did work, but now I just can’t. I’m going to school so hopefully I can go back to work again, because that’s not enough income for a grown person. Heck, that’s not enough income for a child. In MassHealth, they already cut dental care. They’re trying to cut eye care.”

Beverly Ann Rock was out riding a scooter with her great granddaughter Brianna when the WSWS spoke with her. Beverly told us, “I’ve got two cars sitting in my driveway because I can’t afford the gas.” She said that people in her family would definitely be affected by the cuts to food stamps and MassHealth.

“They are making cuts to early childhood development and my great granddaughter’s going to miss that,” she said. “She won’t be eligible for Head Start because they’ve already put a freeze on people coming in. She just turned four. Unless they come up with some money, she’s missed this early childhood intervention; all the slots are filled up.”

Gloria Avila works at the Boston Garden sports facility as well as at a convention center in South Boston. “Right now, I’m not directly affected by these cuts,” she told the WSWS, “but who knows? Tomorrow I could be unemployed.”

“It’s been really bad at my job lately in terms of money, hours,” Gloria added. “But my landlord doesn’t want to hear that! I’ve been with the same landlord for 21 years, so he’s been patient with me so far.

“I feel like we need these things because I see a lot of kids that are having kids and I know for a fact that they don’t have jobs to feed them. So by cutting these programs, they are jeopardizing the little children. So of course, I’m against anything that’s going to hurt the children and my neighborhood, people in the community.

“Even the school budgets, they have cut so much out of the schools, and the kids have nothing to do. And they want to know why the kids are running the streets,

why they’re getting into mischief? It’s because there’s no benefits there for them. And there are no jobs.

“I am a Democrat and Obama went in there with a big deficit to cut, but I don’t think it should be cut from the children. I think there should be more cut from the wars and other things. These wars I truly do not believe in—it’s a big bully thing.

“The banks have billions of dollars, why do they need to get bailout? Who’s bailing me out of my situation? I don’t understand.”



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