

WS

Brace for flood of uninsured

Health officer says U.S., state cuts force poor onto county rolls

by Douglas Tallman

Staff Writer

The families of low-income, legal immigrants will not be able to participate in Maryland's Medicaid program, county health officer Ulder Tillman told the County Council on Tuesday.

Because of state budget cuts, 1,300 children will be "disenrolled," she said. Maryland Children's Health Program can cover only about 100, said Tillman, in her annual address to the County Council.

Over the course of the next year, county health programs expect to see about 600 to 800 of the 1,300 disenrolled, Tillman said, costing the county about \$260,000 in health care and about \$100,000 in dental care.

About 300 pregnant women would remain eligible only until the end of their post-partum period. Continuing coverage by the county would cost \$411,300, Tillman said.

Council members used the news to take a shot at Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr. (R).

"I hope this is very, very clear to people throughout the state that this policy decision by the governor is so heartless and for so little money," said Councilman George L. Leventhal (D-At large) of Takoma Park.

Council President Thomas E. Perez (D-Dist. 5) of Takoma Park directed a question to Tillman: "How is this consistent with family values, to cut pregnant women and children from medical care? Maybe that's a rhetorical question."

Ehrlich spokesman Henry P. Fawell defended the governor's budget.

"There are tremendous fiscal strains on the Maryland health care system. Nevertheless, the governor increased Medicaid funding by 9 percent," he said.

Perez, Leventhal and County Executive Douglas M. Duncan (D) sent a letter to Ehrlich on Tuesday contesting the cuts.

"It is unconscionable that you would even consider ending state support for pregnant women and children," the letter states.

At several instances during the just-concluded budget process for the council, Perez would make note of "the trail of broken promises" that began in Washington and Annapolis and led to the Council Office Building in Rockville. The county would be forced to backfill budgets laid bare by federal and state budget cuts in social programs.

"There is a fundamental transformation taking place," Perez said Tuesday. "The responsibility that used to be federal and state in nature is being given to local governments."

Although considered during the General Assembly session, which concluded April 11, Tillman said she had not gotten confirmation about the policy change until last week.

In her remarks, Tillman also said the county's Montgomery Cares program, which provides uninsured residents access to county clinics, expects to see nearly 15,000 patients.

In the financial year that will end June 30, about 12,000 to 13,000 patients were seen in the clinics, Tillman said.



Perez