

Legislators put kids at back of the line

FEBRUARY 13, 2011

The trouble with troubled kids is it costs money to help them.

Virginia has a slew of programs for kids with mental illness, and many are funded through a mix of state and local dollars.

Medicaid programs provide services essential to tens of thousands of youngsters through counseling and in-home care. But the state House of Delegates last week took parents and advocates for the children by surprise, cutting \$21.6 million in state Medicaid funds and turning the care of those children over to local programs already are overwhelmed.

The Comprehensive Services Act system operates through local governments, using state and local funds. It is meant for foster care, special education and juvenile court cases. In many localities, the caseloads are full. Just wait until they are weighted down by thousands more.

The move was just a ploy, claims Del. Richard Bell, R-Staunton, as the House staked out a position favoring Medicaid cuts. With no companion move afoot in the Senate, the real job of lawmaking will be finished behind closed doors as the House and Senate budgets are meshed.

The trouble with troubled kids is that most of us don't see their pain because it, too, is behind closed doors.

And when the House turns Virginia's troubled kids into just another line item on the beleaguered budget, it will mostly be behind closed doors that the financial matter is settled.

When the Medicaid dollars are cut and when the localities are overburdened with providing essential services, the troubled kids come last again.

Legislators, aren't all our children worth more than that?
