

California child care cuts postponed until Jan. 1

OAKLAND -- Subsidized child care services chopped from the state budget will continue through Dec. 31, according to a legal settlement and court order signed Wednesday in Alameda Superior Court.

About 55,000 children in California, thousands of whom are in the East Bay, originally were slated to lose their child care slots Nov. 1 after Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger vetoed \$256 million from the state's welfare-to-work program. That date has been postponed three times as the result of a lawsuit filed in October on behalf of Parent Voices Oakland. The advocacy group argued that the California Department of Education failed to give families accurate and timely information about possible alternatives.

Parents have until Dec. 10 to ask their contracting agencies to help them find other programs for which they might be eligible. They will receive notices in the mail with instructions on how to make that request. The Education Department has pledged to make sure all of the families that ask for a screening receive it by the end of the year, said Patti Prunhuber, of the Public Interest Law Project in Oakland, which represented the plaintiffs.

Meanwhile, some lawmakers aim to restore the funds when the Legislature reconvenes next month. Prunhuber said a bill could be introduced as soon as Dec. 6.

The families affected by the cut are in the welfare-to-work program but have been off cash aid for at least two years. If funding isn't returned to

the budget, those who cannot find an affordable child care alternative might have to leave their jobs to take care of their children.

"We're really looking to the Legislature for a long-term solution," Prunhuber said.

The state's finances are shaky, however. Last week, about a month after signing the budget, Schwarzenegger called a special legislative session to close a \$6 billion current-year deficit.

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