

WELCOME TO MY NIGHTMARE! PART 2

By Robert Howell, a private dependency attorney representing parents in Los Angeles County

Over the weekend I learned that Governor Schwarzenegger used his line item veto power and removed funding for AB3632, a program in the Department of Mental Health that assures children they will receive educational and mental health services when their mental health issues interfere with their education.

The reason for this suspension is that the state owes counties in excess of a \$133 million dollars for reimbursement of the costs they have had to bear funding these programs. Once again, the state and the Governor have chosen an at risk minority to single out for elimination of their services. The children qualified under this program include those with ADHD, autism, emotional disturbances (such as depression, attachment disorder, OCD) or more serious mental health diagnosis of bi-polar or schizophrenia.

With the state removing the responsibility for this program from the county, it will be up to individual school districts to find the funding, even after the Governor cut their budgets. As an attorney representing parents seeking these services from school districts, my job has gone from tough to almost impossible. For those parents who children are or will be affected, it is little consolation that the program 'might be' funded in the future.

Over the past two years my family has urged me to consider moving to another state, one that is not enduring the deep recession of California. As a parent and as an attorney I have to respectfully decline, because now more than ever we have to fight for those children whom this decision has put more at risk than ever before. Welcome to my nightmare, part two!