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**"Those with developmental disabilities
deserve to be at the top of our
spending priorities, not the bottom."**

The following editorial was posted to **The Daily News** on December 26, 2015.
Services for individuals with developmental challenges are being disrupted.
We hope that you will take a moment to read this message. Your
understanding of the issues and your voice matter.

Thank you,

Your friends at **Valley Village**

By The Editorial Board, LA Daily News

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It's shameful that California's elected leaders have let 2015 go by without taking care of our most vulnerable fellow citizens. We must not allow that to happen again in 2016.

Those with developmental disabilities deserved an increase in funding for the services they receive through the state. They, through the Lanterman Coalition, pleaded for an immediate 10 percent funding hike this year to end the slide in services, followed by a restructuring of the funding system to make it sustainable.

The money was and is there; state coffers are awash in revenue.

But state leaders ignored the need.

Developmental services have been eroding for years, as funding has remained static - and then was slashed by more than \$1 billion during the Great Recession - while the costs for labor and everything else have risen.

It was bad enough ignoring this worsening need during the downturn. It's inexcusable now.

California proclaimed decades ago, in the 1969 Lanterman Developmental Disabilities Services Act, that "people with developmental disabilities and their families have a right to get the services and supports they need to live like people without disabilities," as the Lanterman Coalition website puts it.

But we're breaking that promise now. Developmental funding should be a basic part of the state budget, funded adequately from normal state revenues - not an afterthought punted off to a special legislative session as it was this year.

Those with developmental disabilities deserve to be at the top of our spending priorities, not the bottom.

They should come before the bullet train. (But then, who and what shouldn't?)

They should come before raises for state employees.

They should come before health care for undocumented immigrants.

They should come before so many priorities that were placed above them this past year.

Let's review:

* Brown stiffed the developmental community in his budget proposal in January and again in his May revision.

* A majority of legislators (24 senators and 41 Assembly members) signed onto Sen. Jim Beall's February letter to legislative subcommittee co-chairs advocating for a quick 10 percent funding increase.

* After the Legislature put a modest - inadequate, really - funding increase in its proposed budget in June, Brown nixed it and legislative leaders immediately caved.

* As the regular budget passed, Brown called a special session of the Legislature on Medi-Cal and developmental funding (and another on transportation) which he hoped would produce new taxes to fund them. But Republicans' normal refusal to pass or hike taxes, bolstered by escalating surpluses in state revenues, doomed that prospect. The special sessions have produced nothing.

Check that: The special session on developmental funding accomplished nothing, but it produced something: Senate Bill X2-4, by Republican Sens. Jim Nielson and Jeff Stone, which proposed to sweep whatever "extra revenue" came in to the state treasury into developmental funding, up to that sought-after 10 percent increase. If the bill had become law, developmental funding already would be getting that 10 percent boost, retroactive to July 1 - as shown in the Legislative Analyst's Office's report in November.

But Sen. Ed Hernandez, D-West Covina, chair of the Senate's special session committee, never allowed SBX2-4 to come up for consideration, instead pursuing a tobacco tax hike and other tobacco-related measures.

Meanwhile, the decline in services continued. Statistics being compiled by the Association of Regional Center Agencies for a report to be finalized in January show that over four years ending June 30 of this year, 521 licensed residential homes closed, representing a loss of more than 2,700 beds, and 64 day or work programs shut down,

affecting more than 1,400 individuals with developmental disabilities.

Now, a new regular session of the Legislature will begin in a few days. We urge Sens. Nielsen and Stone to reintroduce their bill in the regular session and the Legislature to pass it as quickly as possible.

More importantly, Gov. Brown must bake that 10 percent increase into the proposed 2016-17 budget he releases in January. Actually, he should do more than that: With the revenue available, Brown's budget should get the state started on a realistic, sustainable funding model that's based on actual and reasonable costs.

We asked Andrea Erickson [[view video](#)], a three-decade professional in the developmental field and now president/CEO of OPARC in Montclair - which serves 800 developmentally disabled clients from San Bernardino to Walnut - what she would say to Gov. Brown and the Legislature if she had the chance.

"I think California has plenty of money. I think it's a question of will. ... Are the most fragile among us really worth protecting and supporting and creating better opportunities for?"

"Let's remember who we are as Californians. And let's put our money into really creating a better state, a better world for the people who most need it. It's totally doable."

Indeed. Now it's up to the governor and the Legislature to do it.

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