Alcoholism Services Escape Major Slash; $63,800 Cut

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Santa Clara County supervisors have voted down a proposed $300,000 cut in the county alcoholism services program's $4.5-million budget.

However, they agreed to slash the budget by $63,800.

Supervisor Geraldine Steinberg made the proposal to cut the budget by $300,000 last week when she led an attack on the cost of the "dry out" and treatment facilities program that will consume nearly $2.5 million in county money.

The state and federal governments will pay for the balance of the program.

Her motion for the cutback was defeated by a 3-2 vote. Supervisor Sig Sanchez voted with her.

Supervisors then voted to decrease the program's budget by 2 ½ per cent in line with similar cuts ordered for almost all county departments. That is the $63,800 slash.

Approval of the alcoholism services was given during budget reviews of the county's public health programs.

Mrs. Steinberg, who had pressed vigorously for tax savings during the two-week budget review, objected to the $1.5-million cost of caring for some 600 hard-core alcoholics.

"People from all over the county are suffering from property taxes," she said. "We have to think about people who will not be able to continue living in their houses in Santa Clara County (because of high taxes)."

Alcoholism services director David Hampton admitted that about 600 alcoholics, described as "falling down drunks," each go through detoxification, or drying out, an average of 22 times a year.

The cost figures out to about $2,500 per drunk.

Hampton, who was hired less than a year ago to bring order to the diversified and often feuding alcoholism services, acknowledged the severity of the problem.

"We're not terribly successful," he told supervisors. He noted that rehabilitation programs may save only a small number of the severe problem drinkers that continually pass through a revolving door of dry out, occasional treatment, back to the streets and more drinking.

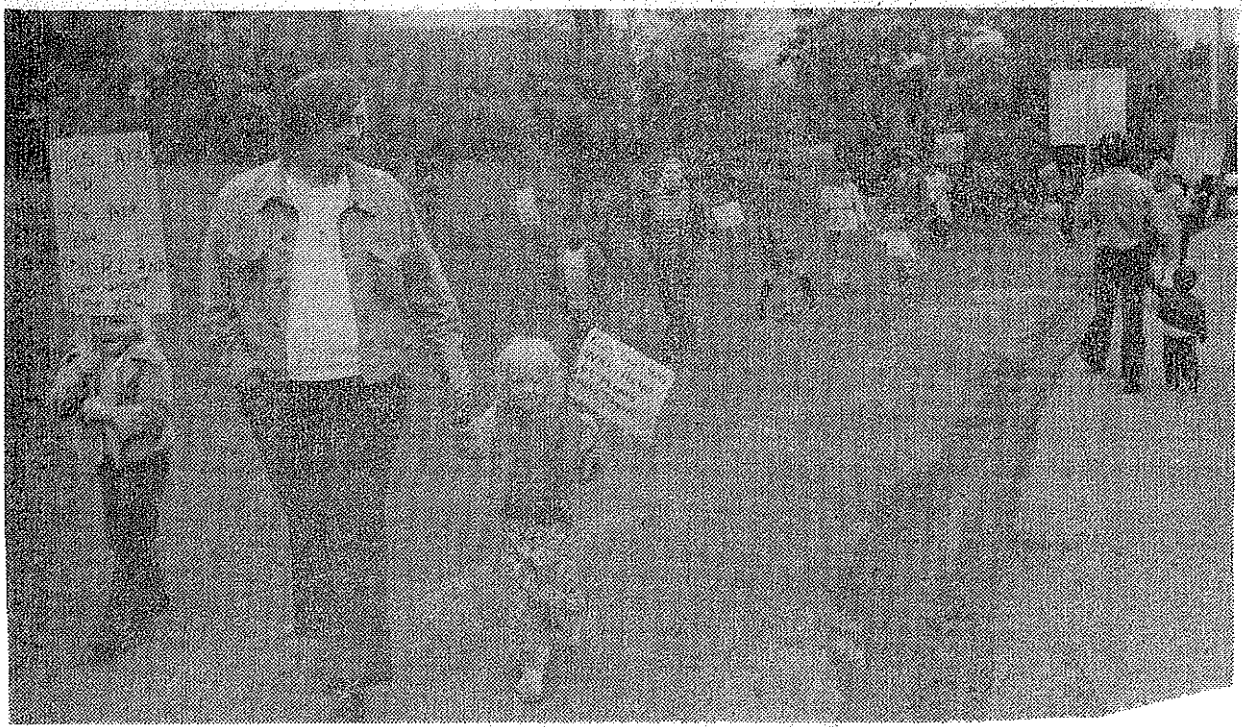
However, he got a vote of confidence from supervisors on his main point that if alcoholism services can't care for the street drunk, the financial burden will be shifted to the county jail and law enforcement agencies.

This year should be a turning point for alcoholism services, reflecting more efficient use of funds and better programs.

When Mrs. Steinberg called for the immediate cut of $300,000 in the program's budget, she argued that Santa Clara County spends more for alcoholism treatment than any other county in the state.

Her motion to decrease the budget was defeated after supervisors heard a number of advocates defend the program.

Supervisors Dan McCorquodale, Dom Cortese and Rod Diridon voted against her motion.



SUPERVISOR PICKETED — Part of a contingent of 20 Welfare Recipients League (WRL) representatives, including 11 small children, is pictured during weekend picketing at the Los Altos home of Supervisor Geraldine Steinberg. The WRL, which assists persons with problems involving public assistance, is protesting the termination of county support of the organization after Sept. 30. —Staff photo

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