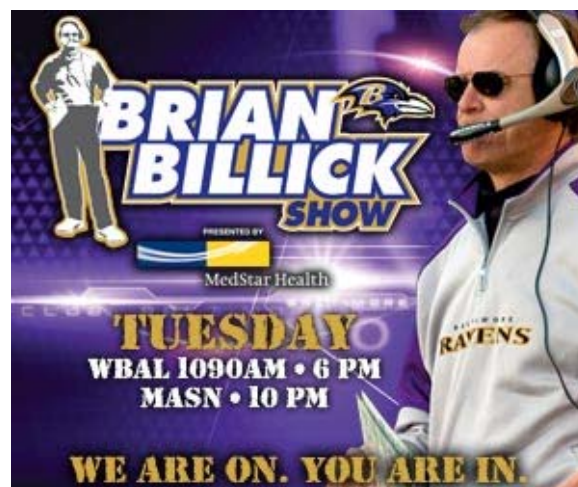


www.baltimoresun.com/news/opinion/editorial/bal-ed.funding21oct21,0,4759135.story

baltimoresun.com

Reality-based budgeting

October 21, 2007



If you think Maryland suffers from profligate government spending, you probably don't have a child with a developmental disability. Those who do know that the waiting list for services - short-term temporary care, perhaps, or a vocational program - is an unacceptable 16,820 families long. And here's the rub: Even if Gov. Martin O'Malley's plan to resolve the state's \$1.7 billion budget deficit is approved by the General Assembly, new taxes and all, the list will continue to be just as long. It would cost nearly \$500 million to eliminate it completely.

As Republicans and other critics line up this week to protest the new taxes contained in the governor's proposal, they'll likely repeat (and repeat) their claim that Maryland can cut its way out of the crisis. In theory, it could, but the consequences would be disastrous. Legislators know it, too.

Yet these critics would have you believe that Maryland is the Ado Annie of states - she can't say no. That's just not true. Governors and lawmakers say no all the time. Just ask the parents of the developmentally disabled, or the elderly in assisted-living facilities that are rarely inspected because there aren't enough investigators, or foster families raising children on reimbursement rates that fall short of actual costs.

But don't stop there. There are plenty of other worthy programs that are chronically underfunded. What would Baltimore be like if drug treatment were available on demand? More than 1,000 prison inmates are waiting for a chance to be educated, an investment that often pays off for the rest of us when they're released.

Services for children with autism, adult education, even economic development programs are already shortchanged. The state needs to spend \$40 million more over the next two years to ensure there are enough dentists to treat disadvantaged children - or risk more deaths like that of 12-year-old Deamonte Driver. Aging medevac helicopters need to be replaced but probably won't be anytime soon; they'd cost \$140 million.

The reality of state government is that most tax dollars go straight into schools, public safety and health care - and often, it's still not enough.

When the General Assembly convenes one week from tomorrow in special session to consider Mr. O'Malley's plan, every option should be on the table, including eliminating government programs that are no longer vital. But anyone who claims cuts can balance the budget is either ill-informed or baldly mendacious.

The deficit wasn't caused by waste; it's primarily the result of failing to pay for programs that most people living in this, one of the wealthiest states in the nation, would regard as sensible and prudent.

Copyright © 2007, [The Baltimore Sun](#)