

Advocates told OASAS cuts could be restored

By CRAIG McGUIRE
Gazette staff writer

Combine one part Assembly Democrat support, one part Republican Senate endorsement, stir in additional revenue and simmer over the flame of growing advocate protest.

That could be the recipe for restoration of proposed budget cuts to the Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS), although the Senate is opposed to an Assembly plan to raise the tax on alcoholic beverages.

Lt. Gov. Stan Lundine, chair of the Anti-Drug Abuse Council, said surplus revenue in the Executive Budget may be used for restoring proposed cuts to OASAS. "We're going to do anything we can to come to a compromise."

Governor Cuomo proposed cutting \$35 million from prevention and treatment programs while expanding treatment capacity.

Sen. Thomas Libous, RC-Binghamton, chair of the Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Committee, told protestors at last week's rally that OASAS funds should be restored. But he said later that he opposes raising taxes to finance restoration. "Additional taxes are not what this state needs."

"After four years of effort, this budget [Cuomo's proposal] sets us back 10 years," he added.

John Brian Murtaugh, D-Manhattan, has proposed raising the state tax on alcoholic beverages. He said a 10 cent hike per gallon of beer and liter of liquor, would generate \$44.4 million in new revenues.

"The \$35 million can be raised pretty easily on the 15 percent of drinkers in New York State who consume 75 percent of the alcohol."

Murtaugh, chairman of the Assembly Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Committee,



Assemblyman Roberto Ramirez, D-Bronx, voices support for restoration of funding to drug and alcohol rehabilitation centers at a rally sponsored by the State Association of Substance Abuse Programs on the

Capitol steps last week. The centers have faced cuts in funding and want monies restored to the budget to fund the rehabilitation, prevention and treatment programs they provide.
Gazette photo by Matthew Gillie

The New York State Association of Substance Abuse Programs (NYSASAP), a coalition of more than 400 drug prevention and treatment programs, is asking the governor and Legislature to restore program base funding in the following areas:

- \$10 million for school-based prevention;
- \$15 million for preserving existing treatment capacity;
- \$5 million for HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis services.

John Clarkson, spokesman for the Division of Budget, said the governor is con-

week at the Capitol, advocates asked the governor to reconsider cuts that would derail his initiative begun three years ago to expand treatment capacity.

Ira J. Marion, president of NYSASAP, said "the state is pulling the rug out from under the service delivery system and effectively reversing its previous policy of expanding the availability of treatment services."

Matching funds have also been jeopardized by cuts.

NYSASAP said every state dollar lost represents another dollar lost in funds

Murtaugh said Manhattan Congressman Charles Rangle told him last month that federal funding is meant to "supplement, not supplant" state dollars.

Calling cost savings an illusion, NYSASAP said the social costs of untreated alcoholism and substance abuse amount to more than \$12 billion each year in crime, health costs, foster care and homelessness.

At a press conference following the rally, Murtaugh said that if New Yorkers don't pay now, they'll have to pay later.

NYSASAP says cuts will force programs to discharge patients.