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Not Merely Numbers

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HARRISONBURG - About 50 members of the Rockingham County Sheriff's Office, most of them in uniform, rose to their feet Thursday to underscore the effect of proposed **budget** cuts in Gov. Timothy M. Kaine's final spending plan. Rockingham County Sheriff Don Farley told a panel of lawmakers, including Dels. Steve Landes, R-Weyers Cave, Beverly Sherwood, R-Winchester, and Joe May, R-Leesburg, that further reductions would mean a loss of personnel.

In all, Farley estimated that his office could lose 20 to 28 people if the proposed cuts are not scaled back.

Farley addressed the legislators at a hearing held Thursday in Harrisonburg on Kaine's proposed \$76.8 billion spending plan. The hearing of the House Appropriations and Senate Finance committees was held at James Madison University.

The General Assembly will review the **budget** beginning next week. Gov.-elect Bob McDonnell, a Republican, must approve the spending plan that emerges from the legislature.

The **budget** proposal from Kaine, a Democrat, seeks to cover a projected revenue shortfall of more than \$4 billion in the fiscal 2011-12 biennium **budget** with spending cuts and a 1 percent income-tax hike.

Budget Testimony

The **budget** testimony in general focused on protecting programs from cuts and hoping for greater **state** support in the future.

Farley said his office would face a loss of \$1.37 million under the proposed **budget**.

Before the hearing, Farley said the deputies were on hand to

show lawmakers how the lost funds would affect his office. The cuts would mean the loss of dedicated personnel, he said.

"They are in this job because their heart is in public safety," he said.

Farley said sheriff's offices across the **state** would likely share a similar fate.

Other appeals to maintain **state** funding included one from Valley Associates for Independent Living.

VAIL helps people with disabilities find community-based services and funding with the goal of staying in their own homes.

VAIL representatives objected to the proposed cuts in the community-based services waiver program. The waivers allow people with disabilities to receive Medicaid funding to pay for services in the community instead of requiring them to live in a nursing home or similar institution.

"Investing in institutions is not a good idea, fiscally," said Marcia DuBois, VAIL executive director.

Representatives of the Harrisonburg and Rockingham Thermal Shelter, or HARTS, also urged lawmakers not to cut the **state** shelter program.

HARTS works to provide homeless shelters during the winter with the cooperation of local churches.

Sandy Brzozowski, a HARTS volunteer at Muhlenberg Lutheran Church in Harrisonburg, suggested that lawmakers spend time in shelters before cutting funding.

"People who live and sleep outside suffer many problems," Brzozowski said.

HARTS Executive Director Brooke Rodgers said Thursday that 23 people on average are staying at the group's 20-bed shelters, which means some are sleeping on the floor.

Sixty people have been turned away so far this winter, Rodgers said.

Pulling The Plug

Other pleas for help came from the technology officers at the Harrisonburg and Rockingham County school divisions.

The proposed **budget** would eliminate school instructional technology funding.

This fiscal year, Rockingham County Schools received \$648,000 in **state** funding for computers. When added to the local 20 percent match, the amount accounts for 70 percent of

the instructional technology **budget**, said Joe Hill, the county's director of math and technology.

This year, Harrisonburg City Schools received \$258,000, or 63 percent, of the division's instructional technology **budget** from the **state**, said D.D. Dawson, the division's director of finance and technology. The amount does not include the local funding match.

"Technology is the right arm of every division in Virginia," Hill said.

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