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POWER

Blind boy pleads with N.J. lawmakers not to cut services

BY TOM HESTER JR. • ASSOCIATED PRESS • APRIL 1, 2008

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TRENTON — Rocco Fiorentino is worried, but his concerns extend beyond what most 11-year-old children fret about.

He worries about simply being able to read.

The Voorhees fifth-grader is blind and fears plans to cut \$600,000 from the state Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired, about a 6 percent cut.

So the Signal Hill Elementary School student visited New Jersey legislators Tuesday and pleaded with them to restore the money.

"Gov. Corzine said the cuts are designed to protect the most vulnerable in our society, but they do not protect me," he said.

Corzine has proposed cutting state spending by \$2.7 billion to try to fix troubled state finances.

Rocco, though, said cuts could affect services that blind and visually impaired children get to learn Braille — the writing system that uses dots read with fingers to help blind people.

"Without Braille, I could not function in school, I could not read books and, most importantly of all, I may not ever be able to get a job," he said. "This cut will affect me and many other blind children across the state of New Jersey. It will mean we get less Braille services and less Braille teachers coming to help us at our schools."

Rocco, blind since being born four months premature at 1.5 pounds, said blind students already only get three hours of weekly Braille instruction.

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"Imagine if your sighted-children had a blindfold on for seven days a week and only took the blindfold off for three hours a week," he said. "How long would it take them to learn the alphabet and read print?"

Lawmakers made no promises to restore the money, though Assembly Budget Chairman Lou Greenwald, D-Camden, praised Rocco's efforts and Assemblyman Gary Schaer, D-Passaic, said he was for "putting a human face" on budget woes.

"Rocco, you may be blind but you were certainly extremely effective today," Assemblyman Declan O'Scanlon, R-Monmouth, told the youngster.

in your voice

READ REACTIONS TO THIS STORY



3teensmom wrote:

There is none so blind as those who will not see. It takes an 11 year old visually impaired child to get these bufoons to even look at the ramifications of their actions! Rocco, you ROCK!!!!

4/2/2008 9:16:16 AM

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jpatrick1967 wrote:

It always amazes me that these law makers make these kinds of cuts without any regard for who it may be affecting, and only until a "human face" is put to it, do they respond. They make these cuts and hope it just goes away without anyone noticing. It takes someone to bring an 11 year old to the law makers to even begin a discussion about it.

4/2/2008 7:24:33 AM

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kevinM wrote:

Keep on fighting ROCCO< one day you could be the govenor also. Just look at new york.

4/2/2008 6:32:51 AM

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mmf1014@yahoo.com wrote:

For all of us that cant stand what Corzine is doing to this state, you may find this of interest. This is a legite site, there is a link on nj 101.5 under Jim Gerharts page. <http://www.recallcorzinenow.com/>

4/1/2008 8:39:31 PM

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whirlwind wrote:

O'Scanlon ran on a pledge to cut the budget. Now when tough choices need to be made he gets sentimental? He basically lied to get into office and is not prepared to govern.

4/1/2008 6:14:24 PM

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slugger wrote:

I guess there aren't any political hacks employed at the Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired. Every entity Buffoon Corslime has proposed cutting so far is not where all the pork is.

4/1/2008 6:09:25 PM

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jwsmit wrote:

actually, amused, i'm pretty sure you had it right the first time. At any rate, this boy's parents must be very proud of him. If the state has any clue about public relations and don't want this becoming NATIONAL headlines they'll drop this cut. Aside from the fact....WHAT THE H WERE THEY THINKING MAKING THIS CUT IN THE FIRST PLACE? I know we're in trouble, but did he really think he'd slide this one by the public?

4/1/2008 5:51:15 PM

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airpat wrote:

None at all - I just think the boy may have been manipulated as a pawn by others.

4/1/2008 5:48:52 PM

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amusedtdth wrote:

sorry, just reread and my dyslexic brain isn't functioning at themoment.

4/1/2008 5:39:29 PM

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amusedtdth wrote:

airpat, I hope you didn't mean that in a malicious manner towards the boy

4/1/2008 5:38:10 PM

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