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HIV

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Instead, committee members backed a plan to seek a serial levy, a renewable property tax, dedicated to law enforcement, said Karsten Rasmussen, budget committee chairman.

"Nobody wanted to do \$4.4 million in cutbacks," he said.

The serial levy will support some law enforcement programs that weren't among the proposed cutbacks and free up money to fund programs like the White Bird Medical Clinic's anonymous HIV testing.

White Bird's clinic coordinator Bob Dritz said employees were upset when they found out about the plan to eliminate the program's \$26,500 of county funding for HIV testing.

"We were a combination of angry and dismayed," Dritz said. "We were angry because we weren't informed of the decision. We found out from the newspapers. The dismay was because the demand for testing is higher than it's ever been."

Dritz said handing the decision of whether the county should fund White Bird's anonymous HIV testing to voters makes him feel equally powerless.

"It takes it totally out of our hands," Dritz said. "It leaves me up in the air in a sense."

Jeanette Bobst, county director of health services, said the proposal she and a management team made to eliminate Lane County funding for anonymous testing and counseling services at White Bird Medical Clinic was not an easy decision.

"I was looking at the services we need to provide in the community to maintain the integrity of our program," Bobst said. "The decisions were not made in a vacuum. The impact on the community of cuts in public health is far greater than the impact of cuts in HIV services."

County commissioners now must vote on the proposed serial levy. Four of the five commissioners said Tuesday said they supported the levy, Rasmussen said, adding he believes they will pass it. Then the proposed levy would go to voters.

Budget committee member Scott Bartlett said commissioners will be making a grave decision if they reject the board's proposal. Cutting funding for White Bird's anonymous HIV testing is not the answer to the budget shortfall, he said.

"It's one less central location for people who want to get tested," Bartlett said. "It takes out one of the legs in the battle against AIDS."

Rob Rockstroh, director of health and human services, said the proposed cutbacks that county officials told him to make were more per capita than they were for other departments.

"We took a 17 percent hit," Rockstroh said. "I was not thrilled they hit me disproportionately. Publicly I understand it because they know we can generate our own funding, but privately it does bother me."

Lane County Public Health can fill White Bird's place if its anonymous HIV testing is cut, Rockstroh said. However, people who seek absolute anonymity may not go to Lane County Public Health, which performs confidential testing.

With anonymous HIV testing, doctors know their patients only by assigned numbers. With confidential testing, doctors know the names of patients, but do not release them.

"If we don't have a name, we can't do follow-up on you, but I can understand the fears of people who don't want to give their name," Rockstroh said. "It's a conflict of values."

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