

Oakland



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EDUCATION

Budget crisis puts students on guard

■ Community college pupils attend forum to keep programs alive

By Michelle Maitre

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OAKLAND — One was a former drug dealer about to graduate from college with honors.

One was a homeless woman hoping to transfer into University of California, Berkeley. And another was deaf, his comments ringing with anger at the loss of

college programs that helped him succeed.

One after another, East Bay community college students stepped up to the podium Wednesday and decried budget cuts that put programs for needy students at risk. A forum at Laney College in Oakland gave the students and some staff members a chance to make sure their voices are heard as the state Legislature continues to debate some \$530 million in

See **CUTS**, Local 4

Contact your lawmakers, students told

► CUTS, from Local 1

cuts proposed for the 108-campus community college system.

Representatives from the offices of state Sen. Don Perata, D-Oakland, and Assemblywomen Wilma Chan, D-Oakland, and Loni Hancock, D-Berkeley, attended the forum and will convey the speakers' comments to the legislators.

Programs that serve low-income and disabled students will be especially devastated by the cuts, and most of the speakers urged the aides to work to shield the programs.

"We're the people who are going to be left behind," said Tina Howerton of San Leandro, who said she sold drugs for 15 years before she enrolled at Laney College. "There is no other way people like myself can move up and build our lives without education."

Howerton, who graduates this year, will head to San Francisco State University next year to study social work. She said it's tough to make ends meet on the \$548 monthly stipend she receives from the state to support herself and her 5-year-old daughter. But she's made it with help from a number of programs — including financial aid, Extended Opportunity Programs and Services, disabled student

services and the CalWORKs program, part of the state's welfare-to-work initiative.

But the proposed budget cuts put those programs in jeopardy. The Peralta Community College District, looking to trim \$12.9 million from its budget, would cut funding 43 percent for the EOPS program, which aids low-income students. Disabled student services would be cut 45 percent — an \$852,000 loss, according to information from the district office.

Chabot College student Sylvia Darensburg of Oakland said she is disturbed the state is putting more emphasis on money for prisons — especially for youth facilities — than it is on education.

Darensburg, who is homeless, said a reference from the Chabot College disabled student program helped her land a spot in transitional housing program.

Otherwise, she said, "I'd be living under a bridge."

Darensburg hopes to transfer to UC Berkeley next year. She said the support she receives from student programs at Chabot has been crucial to her success.

"Without those resources, I would not have a means to climb up, to build the bridge between the haves and the have-nots," she said. "I'm not all the way there yet, but I plan to make it."

Chan's aide at the forum, Julie Hadnot, told students they have the power to make a change in Sacramento, as long as they make their voices heard before the state budget is finalized later this year.

"Contact your elected representatives," she said.

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