

THE GREEN WIRE

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Sen. Green Saves 800 jobs and Funding for Bellefontaine

BELLEFONTAINE NEIGHBORS, MO – Sen. Tim Green (D-St. Louis) successfully restored \$24 million in state and federal funds for the Bellefontaine Habilitation Center in St. Louis, which will remain open for at least one more year after Gov. Matt Blunt did not veto the budget item.

In a press conference today, Sen. Green was joined by state Rep. Gina Walsh (D-St. Louis), residents' family members and employees of the facility to thank advocates for their efforts and to continue to support the center's mission of serving physically and mentally disabled patients.

“Not only would have the state lost millions of dollars if the center was closed, but hundreds of people would have lost the only home they have ever known,” Sen. Green said.

Gov. Blunt announced in January that he wanted to close the facility to save the state \$13.8 million. In January, after the governor's announcement of the closure of the center, Sen. Green took pro-active measures beginning with a meeting with Dorn Schuffman, Director of the Department of Mental Health to discuss the future of the center. Sen. Green also had Senate Appropriations conduct a cost benefit analysis of the facility's closing.

According to state analysts, the governor grossly miscalculated the savings, because the state would actually lose \$23 million in federal matching funds by closing the center.

“Because closing the center would have cost the state money, the governor had no financial reason to veto this item in the budget,” Sen. Green said.

Sen. Green led the charge early on against closing of the facility, citing the residents' inability to speak up for themselves.

“These vulnerable citizens are an easy target, because they have no political voice,” Sen. Green said. “To close this facility and throw these residents out on the streets is nothing less than an immoral attack against innocent people.”

Closing Bellefontaine Habilitation Center would impose great hardship on many of the facility's residents, who would have no place else to go. Sen. Green pointed out that the residents, many of whom have lived at Bellefontaine all of their lives, suffer from such things as severe brain damage, mental retardation, cerebral palsy and autism.

Since February, Rep. Walsh and Sen. Green visited with the governor and asked him to visit the center. Gov. Blunt joined Sen. Green for a tour of the center in late June and on June 23rd he signed the budget keeping the center open.
