

Miss: Defending underused facilities

With New York Gov. David Paterson and legislative leaders trying to pare spending by Tuesday's budget deadline, you'd think that lawmakers would want to eliminate underutilized operations.

But no. A Star-Gazette Albany Bureau report this week shows that provincial legislators are trying to keep open two juvenile detention centers that are woefully underused. Even juvenile-justice advocates are opposed to the continued operation of the Brace Residential Center in Delaware County and the Auburn Residential Center in Cayuga County. Brace has 30 employees for three children in residence. Auburn has 25 employees and no residents, said the Correctional Association's Mishi Faruqee.

The association wants to see the wasted money -- an estimated \$140,000-\$200,000 per empty bed -- spent on alternative programs centered in communities. The association is right.

When a government facility has become obsolete, the money should be shifted to other uses, such as community-based programs that reduce the cost to about \$25,000 a child, according to estimates cited in the bureau article.

So why are local legislators like Sen. John Bonacic of Orange County defending the continued operation of facilities like Brace? Because it's in his district? Not good enough. State taxpayers and juvenile justice programs deserve better for the money being spent inefficiently at these centers.

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