The state's secretary of the Department of Human Services met with a group representing child-care providers last Monday and gave them some bad news. Prepare for $100 million in cuts to child-care programs, Michelle Saddler told the group.

According to a participant in the meeting, Secretary Saddler said the state could freeze intake of new clients, "dramatically" increase parental co-pays, cut rates to providers, and eliminate child care for parents who are in school or employment-related training. The meeting resulted in an urgent alert by Illinois Action for Children imploring supporters to immediately call the governor's office.

The $100-million cut would be for the rest of the fiscal year, which ends June 30. That cut would equal about a third of the child-care program's remaining budget, which comes from both state and federal revenue sources.

After initially refusing to confirm that the secretary of Human Services had warned activists about that impending $100-million cut to child-care programs, the governor's budget office finally shed some light on the matter later in the week.

The cuts are not "new" cuts, according to the budget office. Instead, a spokesperson claimed, these are cuts that were ordered last year and are just now being implemented.

So, in other words, the Quinn administration waited until after the election and after the tax hike was passed to implement huge cuts to a program for mostly poor, single-mother families. And because the administration waited so long, the cuts are now more than twice as deep as they would've been had they been executed at the start of the fiscal year last July.

But, of course, making those cuts last summer would've hurt Quinn with his core constituencies, and he needed every possible vote he could get. Women, the poor, minorities, and liberal voters would've been outraged by major cuts to child-care programs, which help poor families get on their feet. Now, they can all be safely tossed overboard. The election is over. Liberals and minorities in the House and Senate almost all voted for the income-tax hike, believing that the worst cuts were behind them. The deed is done, so the cuts can now be announced.

David Ormsby, a public-relations consultant, claimed last week that Secretary Saddler's department is looking at perhaps $400 million in overall cuts – equal to 10 percent of her department's entire budget.

But because the fiscal year is more than half over, a 10-percent budget cut to DHS now would be equal to more than a 20-percent reduction in the department's remaining outlays. Governor Quinn sharply criticized state Senator Bill Brady on the campaign trail last year for proposing an across-the-board cut of 10 percent, but Quinn is apparently planning to double that amount in one of the departments that he has claimed he holds dear.

And to add insult to injury, Quinn is encouraging groups and businesses that have contracts with the Department of Human Services to lobby legislators for a long-term borrowing plan to pay off the state's past-due bills. The state owes service providers billions of dollars because it didn't have the cash to pay them on-time until the tax hike passed. Many of those providers work in the human-service field. So now Quinn wants them to work to get the money they're owed while simultaneously eviscerating their funding.

The word "chutzpah" comes to mind.

Look: The state didn't have enough revenues to pay for the programs it had for the past few years. That's why we were in such a hole. And everybody at the Statehouse knew that budget cuts would have to happen even after the income-tax rate was increased.

But concealing cuts to child care until after the election and after that tax-hike vote is just downright shameful.

Some think Quinn is trying to create panic by announcing these cuts and then using that angst as leverage to find legislative votes for his borrowing plan. He's done this sort of thing before, only to back off at the last minute. But using poor single moms as human shields would not be his finest hour, to say the least. This whole thing makes me sick to my stomach.

Rich Miller also publishes Capitol Fax *(a daily political newsletter) and CapitolFax.com .*