

## STATE SENATE

# More funding for kids out of foster care halted

By SARAH ARNQUIST  
sarnquist@thetribunenews.com

Republicans in the state Senate stopped the passage of a bill Thursday that would have added \$10.5 million to funding for housing programs for youth transitioning out of foster care, including a dozen youths in San Luis Obispo County.

AB 845 had already passed the Assembly in a 78-0 vote and had support from Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, but it failed in the Senate to gar-

On Thursday, the Senate stopped a bill that would have given \$10.5 million to transitional housing; it would have helped programs in SLO expand

ner the two-thirds majority needed to send it to the governor's desk.

The party-line vote fell short of the two-thirds needed, with 23 Democrats in favor and 13 Republicans against it. Sen. Abel Maldonado, R-Santa Maria, abstained.

Lee Collins, director of

San Luis Obispo County Department of Social Services, said he was disappointed that foster children were being used to send a message about fiscal responsibility to the governor.

"It's just a little unnerving that Senate Republicans want to play that game with this population," Collins said.

Maldonado said he supports funding for transitional housing but did not vote for AB 845 Thursday because Senate leaders asked for more time to negotiate the budget. Democrats shouldn't have put it up for a vote Thursday, he said.

A new bipartisan bill will emerge in a few weeks on the same issue, and Maldonado said he will support it then.

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(OVER →)

## SAN MIGUEL



Jose Ramos Lopez



Jose Tejada Dionicio

# Third suspect sought in rape

Two have already been arrested in the case, and a third is suspected of being an

## Foster

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"I did not get elected to the state Senate to cut foster children," Maldonado said. "I know that, and I would never do that."

San Luis Obispo and other counties were told by state officials that they could plan on the additional funding to build or expand their transitional housing programs for foster youths "aging out" of the system, said Jim Roberts, director of The Family Care Network Inc., which coordinates the local program with the county.

Four former foster youths are currently enrolled in San Luis Obispo County's transitional housing program, and the county hopes to expand its program to 12 youths

— granted it has sufficient funding.

Roberts and Collins remain hopeful that the governor's office or the Legislature will find another way to fund the housing programs, but Collins said he was frustrated that foster children became political pawns.

Last year, the San Luis Obispo County grand jury released a report critical of the support systems available to boost former foster youth to success. The report cited statewide statistics showing that about 65 percent of youths leave the foster system with no place to go, and that they are more likely to become homeless than go to college.

Funding to house these children is a critical first step to help bridge them to success, Collins said.