

Mercer County father pleads for disabilities services funding with 'basket of hope'

By [Trish G. Graber](#)

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TRENTON - When Robert Hage brought his twin daughters home from the hospital, they didn't fuss. "They were literally expressionless, they couldn't move — they just were there," the Pennington man said.



Tony Kurdzuk | Identical 6-

year-old twins Maya (left) and Annika (center) Adrian-Hage, who have developmental disabilities, and their father Robert Hage of Pennington look over a "basket of hope" filled with photographs representing over 160,000 N.J. residents with developmental disabilities before entering the treasurer's office at the State House in an effort to prevent any further cutbacks in state aid to developmental disabilities services.

Born with an "unknown genetic syndrome," the 6-year-old girls have numerous developmental disabilities. They have the mental ability of 3-year-olds, a muscle-tone deficiency that causes full-body weakness and they eat mostly through feeding tubes and take oxygen at night.

But Hage said they have made improvements through occupational, physical, speech and feeding therapies, as well as in-home nursing care, mostly funded by the state.

"In the beginning, they couldn't sit up, they couldn't turn a page on a book, they couldn't do anything," he said. "But these people worked with them tirelessly."

The girls developed muscle tone, allowing them to walk, and now they are learning numbers.

Hage brought his story and others to the Statehouse today as a plea to Gov. Jon Corzine to maintain funding for people with developmental disabilities. The governor plans to trim the state budget by \$400 million to fill a \$1 billion gap.

Hage's twins, Annika and Maya, delivered a basket to state Treasurer David Rousseau filled with photos of people with developmental disabilities and their stories. The gesture represented more than 160,000 people served by the state.

Treasury spokesman Tom Vincz today said Rousseau told the Hage family "the governor has always worked to protect the most vulnerable in his budgets."

Corzine gave his department heads until Tuesday to [come up with \\$400 million in spending cuts](#) as a way to close an unexpected \$1 billion deficit in the current spending plan because of slumping revenue and higher expenses.

Corzine may freeze up to \$400 million in payments to schools, higher education, hospitals, pension funds and [municipalities](#), according to information tucked into a bond disclosure sent to Wall Street investors. He said he already found up to \$200 million in savings elsewhere to close the gap.