

Stop the \$16.6 Billion Betrayal

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

As a lifelong resident of House District 4, I am writing to alert my neighbors to a fiscal crisis in Helena that is being masked by “conservative” rhetoric. While **Representative Lyn Bennett** claims to represent our values, her voting record tells a different story: she has become a key vote for the most bloated budget in Montana’s history.

To most of us, \$16.6 billion is just a number. But let’s look at what that means for your family. **According to the Montana Legislative Fiscal Division (LFD)**, the 2025 biennium budget reached a staggering **\$16.6 billion**. This breaks down to approximately **\$14,561 for every man, woman, and child** in the state over two years.

To see how extreme this is, look at the spending per person in other states compared to Montana:

- **Total State Spending per Capita:** While Montana spends **\$14,561**, **data from the Urban Institute and NASBO** shows the national average for state spending is roughly **\$8,500** per person. Even “high-tax” states like **Illinois** (\$8,100) and **California** (\$10,319) spend significantly less per resident than we do here in Montana. Meanwhile, **New York** spends roughly **\$11,500** per person, and **Wyoming** spends about **\$9,300**.

- **DPHHS Spending per Capita:** Our Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS) alone now consumes **\$7.022 billion**—roughly 44% of our entire state budget. This means we spend over **\$6,100 per person** just on this one agency. In contrast, **U.S. Census Bureau and NASBO figures** indicate that **Wyoming** manages its equivalent health and welfare services for roughly **\$3,588 per capita**, **Illinois** for **\$2,755**, and even **New York**—despite its massive programs—averages approximately **\$4,942 per resident** for those specific services.

We are told this bloat is because Montana is a “large state,” but the truth is our government has become a massive machine that, **according to LFD and national staffing data**, employs **26 state workers for every 1,000 residents**—far above the national average of 17.

Despite this “horribly big” spending, the outcomes for Montana families are tragic. **According to the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS)**, Montana has become the “child removal capital” of America, taking children away from their parents at a rate **300% higher than the national average** (16.8 per 1,000 children in Montana vs. 5.8 nationally).

We have to ask where the money is going. **According to the IRS Exempt Organization Business Master File**, Montana has over **8,500**

non-profits, trailing only **Delaware (10,757)**, **Rhode Island (7,170)**, **Vermont (6,300)**, and **Wyoming (6,173)** in per-capita density. In Montana, these NGOs have become a shadow government, siphoning off grants while the “causes” they claim to serve only get worse.

Instead of fixing these systems, Rep. Bennett voted to funnel our tax dollars into a “shell game” of corporate welfare. While local parents sit on two-year waitlists, **DPHHS grant records** show millions in “Innovation Grants” went to NGOs like **Zero to Five Montana** to subsidize private childcare for wealthy, venture-backed firms like **Foundant Technologies**. We are literally using taxpayer dollars to build “empty rooms” for corporations while our own early childhood teachers are paid less than gas station clerks.

On **June 2, 2026**, we have a clear choice. We can continue to fund a \$16.6 billion bureaucracy that treats families as statistics, or we can demand accountability. **Don’t vote for “Big Government” Bennett**. Vote for the true fiscal conservative fighting for families—**vote for Shaun Pandina**.

Sincerely,

Russell Sias Columbia Falls, Montana 🇺🇸