

Jobs at risk in services for disabled

Gov. Cuomo's plan to cut state funding 6 percent has nonprofits bracing
By Rick Karlin
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ALBANY — A 6 percent funding cut may prompt layoffs among some of the hundreds of private nonprofit groups statewide that serve the disabled and result in fewer services, executives of these groups said on Tuesday.

"We're looking at job cuts," said Hans Meissner, CEO of the Rensselaer County ARC. He added that they may have to lay off 41 of the 250 people that help care for the disabled in his community.

"Everything is on the table right now," added Mary Ann Allen, CEO of Wildwood Programs, which serves about 1,500 people with a staff of 640 workers.

While not talking about job cuts specifically, she and others say a 6 percent reduction in state funding will likely have a big impact. "I can't say 'Let's go to our rainy day fund.' We don't have that," said Allen.

"It is significant," added Valerie Muratori, executive director of Saratoga Bridges, another not-for-profit.

The cuts were first noted in Gov. Andrew Cuomo's 30-day budget amendments that came out earlier in the month.

Notification that came with the amendments explained the cuts were necessary because of a \$500 million budget gap created by a reduction in what the federal government is paying for care of the developmentally disabled under the Medicaid program.

Federal officials concluded recently that New York was getting more than it should for such services. The 6 percent reduction is for not-for-profit providers that are overseen by the state Office for People with Developmental Disabilities.

While OPWDD runs its own centers and residences for those with disabilities, it also oversees a vast system of hundreds of local nonprofits groups across the state.

These organizations often run a variety of programs including residential centers where the developmentally disabled live while getting help with everything from routine tasks such as meal preparation to jobs programs.

OPWDD Commissioner Courtney Burke and other top officials laid out the cuts last week during a phone conference, according to several sources. They explained that because the federal cuts came only recently, it was difficult to account for them in the state budget process, thus the need for across-the-board reductions.

The state budget is due April 1 but lawmakers are trying to wrap it up by March 21 due to the early Passover and Easter holidays this year. Passover begins on the evening of March 25 and Easter Sunday is March 31.

Representatives of several non-profit groups will be speaking during budget hearings scheduled for Wednesday.

Consumers or the New Yorkers who rely on these groups will also be present, with some expected to protest the cuts that could lead to fewer services.

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