

Column: Don't let state hurt people in poverty

By DIANE MANNING

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The budget approved by the General Assembly Appropriations Committee last week falls far short of the amount necessary to maintain services provided by community providers for the Connecticut's most vulnerable residents.

While it includes a slight increase compared to the amount proposed in the governor's budget in fiscal year '08, there is no additional funding included for '09. Even the small increase included does not begin to cover the costs of services that have been historically under-funded. The only option faced by community providers will be reductions in some services and closure of others. Providers neglected

While both the governor's budget and the appropriations budget include hundreds of millions of dollars in new spending, both fail to make any new investment in community providers.

Those providers have proven to be the most cost-efficient and effective means of providing care to nearly 500,000 men, women and children with a variety of special needs, including developmental disabilities, mental illness, substance dependency and domestic abuse.

Connecticut state government relies on the community provider network to deliver quality social service programs.

As president/CEO of United Services, I am proud to serve as a part of this network. United Services is a comprehensive behavioral health center providing mental health and addiction treatment, community based supports, crisis intervention and domestic violence services to more than 4,000 adults, children and families in northeastern Connecticut.

New demands on us

Like every other area of the economy, we are already dealing with escalating utility, transportation, insurance and labor costs, and a variety of other demands. At the same time, the demand for our services had increased dramatically, as the state turns to us to help its vulnerable citizens.

Funding shortfalls will inevitably force our organization and many others to reduce staff and eliminate services. Such decisions will have devastating effects for our clients, who count on us each and every day for the help they need and deserve.

We ask the governor's office and legislative leaders of both parties reconsider the budget recommendations and do all they can to ensure our state's most vulnerable citizens continue to receive these vital services by adequately funding Connecticut's nonprofit community provider network.

Diane L. Manning is the president and CEO of United Services Inc in Dayville. The organization serves much of Windham County.