

Budget impacts community service groups

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Hartford (WTNH) - Representatives of hundreds of community service providers across the state are saying they can't live with the Governor's budget proposal.

That's because it flat-funds the organizations for three years in a row at a time when they say the need for help is growing.

Everyone knows the state is financially in rough shape. But, these organizations say they've already been hurt even before the economic slow-down.

Governor Rell took time out to travel to North Branford for the 105th birthday celebration for Florence Diehl who has lived through every economic downturn since 1905. While the Governor was at the party, representatives of the state's community providers were at the State Capitol begging for help.

They represent the operators of group homes and other services for those with disabilities, mental illness, and substance abuse problems; human services of all kinds for nearly half a million state residents.

Paul Acker, 44, of East Hartford is one of them who now is able to work. "I went to 'Inter Community' and there I got the help from some dedicated professionals who believed in me when I couldn't believe in anything at that time," he said.

At a time when costs are soaring, the community providers get no increase in funding for three straight years under the Governor's budget.

"Fully funding the community provider system can save the state money in the long term by preventing many of our clients from needing higher and more costly levels of care," said Barry Simon, of Gilead Community Services.

That could mean trips to the Emergency Room, prolonged hospitalizations or even the criminal justice system.

"Not just for people like me who came through the system and found success but for the people who are still struggling to find their dreams again," said Acker.

"I understand their plight, I truly do but I'm hearing it from every other organization, every provider, every hospital, every everywhere and we're going to have to make some difficult choices," said Governor Jodi Rell.

Democrats in the legislature are planning to announce the real cost of the Governor's plan to run the state without any tax increases within the next few days.

The prediction is that the real cuts it will take, which will be much deeper than already announced, will make the decision to raise some taxes easier.

View a short video clip that aired on the 6pm news on Channel 8 on 3/3/09:

http://www.wtnh.com/dpp/news/news_wtnh_hartford_budget_community_impact_200903031932_rev1