

Nonprofits want share of energy aid coming from state surplus

By Keith M. Phaneuf
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HARTFORD — Connecticut's private, nonprofit social services are asking Gov. M. Jodi Rell and legislators to reserve a portion of special fuel relief funding expected to be approved next week for their agencies.

The nonprofits, which provide the bulk of state-sponsored social services at about half the cost, received no increase in this fiscal year's state budget.

"Over the last 20 years, funding for community providers has consistently failed to keep pace with inflation," Terry Edelstein, president of the Connecticut Community Providers Association, wrote to Rell.

Edelstein, who also appealed to House Speaker James A. Amann, D-Milford, and Senate President Pro Tem Donald E. Williams Jr., D-Brooklyn, added that nonprofits have been hit hard by high fuel costs.

Many agencies, particularly those that work with retarded clients, drive them to and from jobs and other locations throughout their communities.

The high cost of home heating oil and natural gas affects many nonprofits, particularly those providing residential services.

"We're squeezed," said Ronald Cretaro, executive director of the Connecticut

Association on Nonprofits. "They've all got less money, and they've got to figure out how to provide the same services."

State government will spend about \$1.3 billion out of this fiscal year's \$18.4 billion budget to hire hundreds of nonprofit agencies to provide services to people with mental retardation, the mentally ill, abused children, drug addicts, prison inmates, and others

Nonprofit social workers on average earn 50 percent of the pay of comparable state employees.

Further complicating matters, roughly \$2 million from nonprofit funding was cut last month when Rell ordered \$160 million in emergency reductions across most of the state budget to eliminate a projected deficit in 2009.

Despite that predicted shortfall, though, the administration says state government closed

the 2008 fiscal year on June 30 about \$22 million in the black.

Rell proposed adding those funds to winter heating relief programs for low-income households, and legislative leaders, who also endorse the idea, have scheduled an Aug. 22 special session.

But Amann said today that while final language on a relief bill still is being negotiated, the focus so far has been on providing relief to needy households, not to specific groups such as the nonprofits.