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"State's AIDS Services Face Serious Cuts"

"State's AIDS Services Face Serious Cuts"
The Day (New London) (02.19.09)

Ted Mann

The recent budget proposal by Gov. M. Jodi Rell includes a \$2.7 million cut from state AIDS services during each of the next two fiscal years. The funds targeted had been added last year to partially compensate for a \$3.3 million reduction in federal Ryan White money. An additional proposed cut of almost \$500,000 would impact the state's needle-exchange program and services for adults and children affected by HIV/AIDS. Rell would also delay a Medicaid waiver for home-based services for up 100 HIV/AIDS patients, valued at more than \$4.6 million over two years.

Rell's representatives said federal funding would backfill some of the cuts by the spring, but AIDS advocates and experts criticized the cuts as disproportionate, and the hope for federal money as unsubstantiated. The Legislature is reviewing the proposals.

The \$3.3 million federal cut represented 53 percent of the combined \$6.25 million federal-state budget for the program, said Robert S. Broadhead, sociology professor at the University of Connecticut. In contrast, the number of HIV/AIDS patients is rising by more than 4 percent per year, he said.

"We're content to let the federal government do whatever it was going to do and we'll go back to our state number," said Jeff Beckham, deputy secretary of Rell's budget office. "If the feds step up, they step up, if they don't, they don't. And from the state's point of view, it's a tough budget year, and it requires a lot of tough calls."

"I don't think that the proponents of the cut have demonstrated that what the state is going to take away is going to be replaced," said Broadhead. "It's just laughable. There's nothing proportional going on here. That's what I feel like should be pointed out. Can't we have a little bit of equity across the board?"

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