
Human services activists push for increased funding for nonprofits

By **NICK NIEDZWIADK** | 12/08/16 04:12 PM EST

ALBANY — A handful of Democratic Assembly members joined dozens of activists at the Capitol on Thursday to call for improving funding for human services nonprofits.

Ronald Deutsch, executive director of the Fiscal Policy Institute, said that after years of belt-tightening in the wake of the recession, many nonprofits are at risk of insolvency or drastically cutting services without increased funding.

“We’re at a tipping point right now and we’ve seen first hand the struggles that many groups are facing,” he said.

A coalition of more than 270 nonprofit health and human services organizations launched a campaign called Restore Opportunity Now in order to push for increased state money to these groups.

Glenn Liebman, chief executive of the Mental Health Association in New York State, said increased money is essential to preventing burnout among employees.

“We’re all mission driven, we all truly believe in the mission, but people have loans to pay, need to live and eat and make a substantive living,” Liebman said.

Allison Sesso, executive director of the Human Services Council, said one of the campaign’s specific goals is for state contracts with the nonprofits to include provisions that help pay for the state’s newly increased minimum wage.

“It needs to be funded in our contracts, otherwise it’s just another budget hole for us,” she said.

Democratic Assembly members Phil Steck, John McDonald and Patricia Fahy spoke in support of Restore Opportunity Now.

“What has not followed completely are the financial resources to invest in the human capital,” McDonald, who also works as a pharmacist in Cohoes. “We talk about the physical capital....at the end of the day this is human services, it involves human beings working and caring for each other.”

The Assembly members said that the upcoming budget is likely to be tight, but that it is critical to fund these services.

Deutsch said the group does not yet have a specific dollar amount that it would like to see invested into human services nonprofits, but said they are hoping to realign government priorities in their favor.

“There is a real misalignment between the way we’re paid through our government contracts, and what we have to do on the front lines,” said Allison Sesso, executive director of the Human Services Council, which is one of the leaders of the effort.

“There is an expectation that we are coming to government with a basket full of goods that we just don’t have.”

“We’re dealing with human beings,” said Scott McDonald, who represented Urban Pathways, an organization that connects homeless New Yorkers with social services.

“[We’re] not dealing with statistics, not dealing with reports, we’re dealing with human beings.”