

# Elderly at risk as aid groups worry

## Meals, home visits may stop

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Kimberly Denis, executive director of the Montgomery County Office for the Aging, is watching the calendar closely these days.

As each week passes without a state budget, her not-for-profit agency moves closer to bankruptcy. Come July 1, Denis said, her agency will have to start cutting services to between 4,000 and 5,000 senior citizens in Montgomery County.

"I don't know who will take care of them. I am fearful that some of these frail, elderly individuals are going to suffer," Denis said. "It is very desperate. It is critical. There is no fund balance here, no cushion to fall back on."

The Montgomery County Office for the Aging is one of thousands of not-for-profits struggling to make ends meet until the state passes a budget, said state Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli.

DiNapoli said the state has 25,811 contracts with not-for-profits totaling \$41.9 billion, including the Montgomery County OFA. Most have not received any money from the state since April 1, when the 2009-2010 budget expired. Albany lawmakers remain deadlocked over approving a 2010-2011 budget. In the meantime, Gov. David Paterson continues to forward weekly budget extenders to keep state government operating.

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## Agencies

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His extenders, however, do not contain money for non-profits.

"It is getting worse for not-for-profits," said Jennifer Freeman of the comptroller's office. "The bulk of them not have been paid. They have existing contracts for state services and have submitted vouchers and are waiting to be paid. They have tapped their reserves and are considering whether to tap their lines of credits."

### LAST DITCH

Freeman called this a last-ditch move for agencies, as it adds to their costs of doing business on already tight budgets.

The cash crunch is so bad Centro Civico in Amsterdam on Tuesday laid off its staff of approximately 30. The majority of them came to work Wednesday, however, said Director Ladan Alomar.

"We all came to work as if we were not laid off because it is very important that we serve the community under all circumstances," Alomar said Wednesday afternoon. "We are very passionate about what we do and we believe in our mission. Even though we are laid off, we are here serving the people."

Centro Civico's roughly \$2 million budget is 90 percent dependent on state funds. After three months without reimbursements from the state, the nonprofit is waiting for about \$500,000 and is unable to pay its staff.

Centro Civico provides services to the community, particularly the Hispanic community in Amsterdam, including youth programs, job assistance and English as a Second Language courses.

Employees who were temporarily laid off, including Alomar, will file for unemployment, she said. Once the budget passes and funds are ready to be released, Alomar said everyone will be rehired.

"And obviously the vendors, who have been patiently waiting for payment, will be paid," she said.

### VULNERABLE SUFFER

Kathy Pelham, CEO of the United Way of the Greater Capital Region, said the lack of a state budget is "creating a great deal of anxiety and the forecast is that the not-for-profit community will suffer. But more importantly, the

people who receive those services will be in jeopardy."

Denis said the situation is so dire the Montgomery County Board of Supervisors is expected next week to advance the remainder of its yearly allocation to her agency, amounting to \$128,000. The county supplies \$220,000 annually to the county OFA, which it uses to leverage state and federal reimbursements. Its budget is \$1.3 million, most coming from the state.

The Montgomery County OFA is different from others in New York in that it is a nonprofit, one of only four out of 59 offices for the aging. The other 55 are supported by their respective counties and are currently receiving funds from the state.

Denis said the \$128,000 allocation will carry her agency through the end of June. "Even though it will assist us now in this crisis to pay bills, without state money the allocation is just buying us time. July 1 is when we will be struggling to pay bills," she said.

The Montgomery County OFA contracts with vendors to deliver meals and provide home health aides to senior citizens, allowing them to remain in their homes and out of expensive nursing homes. Denis called these the agency's core services. The agency delivered 86,000 meals last year and is currently serving 60 people with expanded in-home services, with a waiting list "that grows daily," Denis said.

Denis said she will prioritize services to be cut, leaving the core for last. On the chopping block are the agency's transportation program, its caregiver respite program and its legal and weatherization programs.

Reza Mizbani of the state Office for the Aging said his agency is working closely with the Montgomery County OFA to avert a shutdown. "We don't want that to happen. We will advise them on whatever remedies there are to help them move funds around to cover operations," he said.

Assemblyman George Amodeo, R-Rotterdam, said he is pushing for a state budget to help the nonprofits. "This is the result of not having a budget. It is hurting not-for-profits that are giving essential services to citizens who cannot take care of themselves. It is one of the priorities of government and government is failing the people. We need to get this budget done and we need to get it done now."

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