

Montgomery County OFA concerned about state funding

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FONDA - The county with the third- largest senior citizen population in the state could see its Office for Aging run out of money.

According to the 2000 census, 23 percent, or 11,498, of Montgomery County's residents are age 65 or older. County officials are concerned seniors who depend on the Office for Aging's services may be at the mercy of state lawmakers and their failure to pass a state budget.

The Montgomery County Office for Aging is one of four in the state that have a not-for-profit status. The others are Tioga, Yates and Madison counties.

"The [state] budget extenders, or emergency budgets, do not allow the release of funds to not-for-profits at this stage," said Reza Mizbani, a state Office for the Aging spokesman. "As soon as the budget is passed, hopefully this month, their funding will be restored. We are working with them to make sure their services are not interrupted."

MCOFA Executive Director Kimberly Denis said the home-delivered meals program, offered to home-bound adults age 60 and older, is one of the programs threatened by the delay in funding. She said about 220 people take advantage of that program. The Expanded In-Home Services for the Elderly is another program that depends on state funds. EISEP serves about 60 seniors now, with about 25 on the waiting list, she said.

"These are the services that are keeping the most vulnerable seniors at home, eating nutritiously and living independently - not having to go into a nursing home program," Denis said.

The county OFA relies on timely federal and state reimbursement to pay subcontractors for its services.

"From my understanding, years ago, Montgomery County thought they could not afford to continue providing support for this agency, so they dropped us from county government and we went back out and got sponsorship," Denis said.

In 1996, the OFA became a private, not-for-profit corporation. Before that, it had several sponsors from its inception in 1975 as a result of the 1973 amendments to the 1965 Federal Older Americans Act.

Supervisors will vote at their full board meeting June 22 on whether to release the remainder of the Office for Aging's budget this year.

The measure passed through the Health and Human Services committee last week with no opposition.

The county allotted about \$200,000 for the Office for Aging in 2010's budget.

Board of Supervisors Chairman Vito "Butch" Greco said the \$128,140 left for the year will hold the Office for Aging over for about a month. That approximately \$100,000-per-month operating cost includes payroll, mortgage, utilities and services, Greco said.

"I'm afraid of the consequences [of OFA running out of money]," Greco said. "I really am. I don't know what else the county can do. It's just not right that this is happening, but we'll try to keep it afloat."

The Office for Aging's 2010-11 annual proposed budget is \$1.3 million, according to the organization's website, www.mcofa.org.

About 70 percent of funding for the budget comes from the state Office for Aging. About 16 percent comes from the county taxpayers and the balance from fundraising, donations, private foundations and some towns and villages.