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Federal Budget Cuts Threaten Help For Rape Victims



Reporting
Susan Carlson

CHICAGO (CBS) — Chicago crisis counselors who have been helping rape victims for years are now facing a crisis of their own. Funding is running out for services that treat women who are victims of sexual assault.

As CBS 2's Susan Carlson reports, Chicago's only rape crisis hotline is operated out of the YWCA and has been providing support for hundreds of thousands victims since 1998.

Counselor Alicia Oeser feels she's making a difference in many women's lives.

"When someone verbally expresses that to you and they tell you how grateful they are that you were able to answer that phone," she said.

But thanks to 2008 federal budget cuts in the Violence Against Women Act and the Victims of Crime Act, she'll soon be out of a job.

"The budget cuts are going to be tough in negotiating how to provide those same services," Oeser said.

Seven YWCAs, including a Loop office, offer support services to victims of sexual assault. Twenty-five percent of the positions at all of those centers have just been eliminated.

"It's pretty devastating," said hotline coordinator Vickie Sides. "It's a tremendous impact and not just on the program but on the morale of the people who are left."

The hotline is not the only program for sexual assault victims now at risk.

Sharmii Majmudar of Rape Victims Advocates says that group is also in trouble.

"We are at capacity with our counseling programs," she said. "We [are] actually having to put victims on a waiting list at this point and the [Victims of Crime Act and Violence Against Women Act] cuts mean that the waiting list would just get longer."

A coalition of victims' advocate groups are appealing to lawmakers to intervene.

"We're obviously imploring Congress on the federal level and we're saying to our city, county and state: you also need to step up," said Jeanette Castellanos of Sexual Violence Support Services.

The full impact of the cuts won't be felt until July, when the budget takes effect. If funding doesn't come through, the advocates say many victims will not get services they desperately need.

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YWCA Metropolitan Chicago
365 N. MICHIGAN AVENUE

Rape Crisis Counselors Facing Crisis Of Their Own

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Cuts in federal funding will limit services to Chicago rape victims, including staff cuts at the city's only rape crisis hotline.
CBS

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