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Federal funding cuts could devastate rape crisis hot lines, leaders say

Chicago line may have to end 24-hour availability

By Monique Garcia | Tribune reporter
11:12 PM CDT, April 24, 2008

Chicago's only 24-hour rape crisis hot line may have to scale back its hours because of federal funding cuts that are forcing support agencies for victims of sexual assault to reduce staff and services, officials said.

The leaders of several social service groups gathered Thursday to discuss the impact of the cuts on victims across the Chicago area, encouraging people to lean on city and state officials to help pick up the slack.

Federal cuts will translate into a loss of about \$1.3 million for sexual-assault victims centers across the state, including a \$376,000 drop for the four centers in Chicago and a \$130,000 cut for three suburban centers, according to the Illinois Coalition Against Sexual Assault.

While the numbers may not seem like much, they are devastating considering these groups already work on shoestring budgets, said Jeanette Castellanos with the YWCA of Metropolitan Chicago.

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"We have to look and see how to prioritize our services," Castellanos said. "At this point, it looks like counseling and our 24-hour services are going to feel the largest impact. We don't know if we'll be able to man the phones or get to the hospital when a woman's been assaulted at 2 a.m., 3 a.m. or 4 a.m. It's upsetting because we know that's when people need us the most."

The cuts are the latest symptom of tight financial times, but that doesn't make the blow any less painful, several leaders of the social services groups said. Not providing the resources to help victims heal is akin to making them relive the trauma and poses a safety threat to the entire community, they said.

"Providing services to rape



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nili Majmudar, executive director of Rape Victim Advocates. "Not working with one victim of rape means we're not working with their partners, their families and their children. It means another rapist that can possibly not be held accountable by the court system."

For the first time ever, Castellanos said the YWCA is seeking a budget appropriation of \$150,000 from the city, primarily to keep the citywide hot line running around the clock. Castellanos and others have started lobbying aldermen and are encouraging people to speak out.

In Springfield, Sen. David Koehler (D-Peoria) is working to gather support for a proposal that would impose a \$2 tax per strip-club patron, with the money going to fund services for sexual assault

victims.

Victim-service providers say they know they have a tough fight ahead of them, but they won't give up hope.

The Chicago Rape Crisis Hotline can be reached at 888-293-2080.

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