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### Proposed federal cuts threaten D/SAOC funding

By JOHN MOLSEED, Messenger staff writer

POSTED: March 7, 2008

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The agency that victims of domestic assault turn to for help is asking for some assistance from lawmakers.

The Domestic Sexual Assault Outreach Center faces losing nearly 10 percent of its funding if federal grant money for crime victim services is slashed as proposed, said Executive Director Joyce DeHaan.

The Victims of Crime Act, Violence Against Women Act and the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act grant funds will be reduced by 20 percent in the fiscal year beginning in July.

DeHaan returned from a trip to Washington, D.C., earlier this week to personally plea with lawmakers to restore the funding.

"We can't stand any more cuts," DeHaan said. "We operate on a shoestring budget."

The D/SAOC shelter house is open to individuals and families escaping domestic violence. The Fort Dodge shelter is the only one of its kind in the region, serving Humboldt, Calhoun, Webster, Hamilton, Pocahontas and Wright counties.

Between food, staff, utilities and other operational expenses, DeHaan said any cut in funding would be a cut in service. Cutting utilities, food or staff aren't options, she said.

"It makes a difference whether people stay alive or not," she said.

D/SAOC was also charged by state leaders to establish a shelter in Carroll County and serve Crawford County. Lawmakers promised a budget of \$160,000 to run the other shelter but now, with reduced federal funds, they're asked to do the same with \$90,000.

DeHaan was in Washington, D.C., Monday to tell staffers, including those from Rep. Tom Latham's and Sen. Tom Harkin's offices, what the cuts would do to the services D/SAOC provides. The trip was funded by the Mary Kay company. DeHaan said she is unsure if her presentation made a difference.

"It's hard to tell," she said, adding, "They listened."

If the cuts remain in the budget as planned, DeHaan said she will turn to area service organizations to help make up the short fall.

"We never leave a rock unturned," she said, adding that D/SAOC won't be alone in its search for other funds.

"We'd have to get in line," she said.

Charging for service is not an option, she added.

"I would hate someone not come here because they can't afford it, and it would happen," she said, adding that domestic violence victims are already reluctant to seek help.

"There are all kinds of other barriers," she said.

State and local governments may be asked to make up the difference. Webster County Victim/Witness coordinator Robbie Michehl's position is paid in part by a VOCA grant. She writes her grant application to pay for her salary. Michehl works with victims of crimes as their cases move through the criminal court system.

This coming fiscal year, the VOCA grant will be decreased by 22 percent. She hopes Webster County will

### Article Photos



-Messenger photo by Hans Madsen

Domestic/Sexual Assault Outreach Center legal advocacy coordinator Deb O'Tool, center, talks with client DeNae Warren, right, Wednesday afternoon.

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be able to make up the difference, but she worries about agencies that work with crime victims.

"When it comes to non-profit and human service agencies, that's a big impact," she said.

DeHaan praised community support for D/SAOC that has helped the agency. With less than a month until the annual D/SAOC cake auction, she hopes the community is willing to do a little extra — if necessary.

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