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Local crisis centers ask public for more help

Groups that help abuse victims have seen cut in federal funds

Tuesday, March 4, 2008

BY ANDY KRAVETZ
OF THE JOURNAL STAR

PEORIA - Wanted: A wealthy donor willing to make up for a shortfall in federal funding.

It's not the common newspaper classified, but U.S. Rep. Ray LaHood joked it might be a viable way to correct a decision from Washington, D.C., which has led to a \$244,000 cut in funding for area crisis centers that deal with victims of domestic, sexual and child abuse.

LaHood's half-joking remarks came Monday morning as he and several other elected officials joined Martha Herm, the head of The Center for Prevention of Abuse, in trying to get the word out to the public that their help is needed.

The center and several other agencies around the Tri-County Area will feel a 25-percent cut in their funding this summer. Worse, Herm and others say, there is talk that all funding, some \$1.3 million, could disappear next summer, causing the loss of jobs and services for those who need them.

That, said Corie Sego of the Family Justice Center, could "set the

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community back 20 years" in how it deals with domestic violence and other forms of abuse.

LaHood, R-Peoria, said he believes the money will come back somehow because "the programs are very popular with Congress." He pointed out President Bush has sent budget proposals in the past which have slashed or eliminated programs, only to have those dollars restored.

"There is a saying in Washington. The president proposes and Congress disposes," he said. "The truth is, and the president knows this, is that the funding will be restored. At what level or how, I don't know."

Peoria Mayor Jim Ardis and his Pekin counterpart David Tebben said the time to act together is now. The two leaders both said recent tragedies in the news as well as the arrest of a man accused in several sexual assaults in Peoria show there is a need for the center and its counterparts elsewhere.

"This is not a matter of this side or that side of the river," Tebben said.

The funding is for the Violence Against Women Act and the Victims of Crime Act, both of which are funded by fines and fees assessed to those who have been convicted of a crime. However, it is Congress which sets the caps on how much of the collected money is distributed each year.

And because the money all goes into the general operating fund, it comes under the control of Congress and the president's budget proposals.

In the meantime, Herm said there is a very real problem now. With more people using her center as well as agencies like the Family Justice Center and Fulton-Mason Crisis Service, the money lost could mean fewer people are helped or lost jobs. Hence, the public appeal.

"We're hoping, though, the public will step forward and buy more ducks in our duck race or send donations to the child advocacy center or our other programs. That's what we're hoping will come out of this," Herm said.

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