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York County's Caring Unlimited faces closure because of budget cuts

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Mary Donahue works as an outreach advocate for Caring Unlimited, a domestic violence program that may be forced to close.

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By **Karen Dandurant**

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March 12, 2008 6:00 AM

SANFORD — The staff at Caring Unlimited, a domestic violence program serving York County, says it will be forced to close its doors if federal and state budget cuts totaling \$1.1 million are approved.

Caring Unlimited has served all of York County for the past 30 years.

The impending closure is a reality and not a threat, said Jill Barkley, public awareness and community support coordinator for the organization.

"With the state and federal budget cuts combined, we're looking at losing \$1.1 million. Our budget is \$1.4 million, so if we lose that there's no way to operate on \$300,000 a year. We would not be able to function in any way," she said.

It's not only the Sanford-based main office that would be hurt, Barkley said. The cuts also would affect the Kittery satellite office.

Gov. John Baldacci's supplemental budget eliminates funding for all domestic violence services in Maine beginning July 1.

President George Bush's fiscal year 2009 budget proposes cuts to the Violence Against Women Act, the Victims of Crime Act and the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act.

Barkley said the state funding cut impact for her agency is \$168,000.

"Just with the state cuts, we'd have major layoffs and downsizing," she said. "Our services to victims of domestic violence, our programs would be greatly reduced. The outlook is scary."

The state cuts affect all of the nine domestic violence projects in Maine.

"For some projects, the state funding represents an even greater percentage of their budget than at Caring Unlimited," said Barkley. "We all work together. Sometimes a woman needs to leave their town to be safe. We take in women from Bangor, from Florida, Michigan and California, really from anywhere."

Barkley said Caring Unlimited is hoping the community will get involved.

"We're asking people in York County to call their local state legislators and ask them not to support the proposed budget; and to ask for the full restoration of funding for domestic violence services," she said.

"We're asking they call their Washington legislators, too. Call Senators Olympia Snow and Susan Collins. Call Congressman Tom Allen about the federal budget."

"We don't have times yet on when they will discuss our issues, but we are planning to bring people in mass numbers to show support," Barkley said. She said anyone who is attending can call 490-3227.

Last year, Caring Unlimited responded to more than 3,000 people seeking assistance to become safe from an abusive relationship.

Last month, it responded to 990 hotline calls, the shelter was full with 36 women and children unable to be safe in their homes, and the support groups had 104 women attending.

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