



Aid Is Cut to Programs for Sex-Crime Victims

By TRYMAINE LEE

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At a time when the Police Department is examining how it trains its officers to handle sex crimes, the [City Council](#) has eliminated financing for programs that help victims of sexual assault, including sexually abused youths, young men and immigrants.

Missing from the \$63 billion budget that was passed by the City Council this week was \$332,500 that had helped finance the [New York City Alliance Against Sexual Assault](#) and three rape crisis programs: one at the [Kingsbridge Heights Community Center](#) in the Bronx, the [Mount Sinai Sexual Assault and Violence Intervention Program](#) in Queens and the St. Luke's-Roosevelt Intervention Program in Manhattan.

The cuts come weeks after a task force formed by Commissioner [Raymond W. Kelly](#) recommended new training protocols for officers after it reviewed complaints from sex crime victims and rape treatment counselors that victims' claims were often ignored or minimized by the police.

While attacks classified as rapes dropped 35.7 percent from 2005 to 2009, there has been a sharp increase in the rate at which complaints of forcible rape have been dismissed by the police as false or lacking enough evidence to take to court.

As the Council and Mayor [Michael R. Bloomberg](#) hammered out the final details of the budget, there was the usual outcry over cuts to particular programs or agencies, especially since a budget shortfall resulted in some significant reductions.

But the elimination of the money to help sexual assault victims services was approved with little notice, said Harriet Lessel, the executive director of the New York City Alliance Against Sexual Assault, who said the Council's move cost the organization one-third of its operating budget.

Ms. Lessel, who said the city had provided money for the organization every year for nearly a decade, said she was shocked when she got word the financing was being ended.

"We had no idea that there was going to be a complete cut," she said. "We expected some cuts, but certainly we could not have imagined that all funding to the programs would be cut."

"We thought the City Council understood that sexual assault was a serious public health and human rights issue that can be prevented," Ms. Lessel said. "It's really disappointing and devastating."

She said the loss of financing would end the organization's initiatives to reach out to victims in immigrant communities, to help nurture grass-roots community coalitions in the South Bronx and the Lower East Side and to promote sexual education to at-risk youth.

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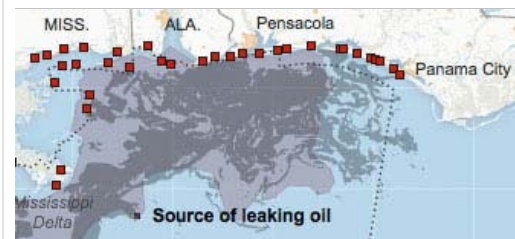
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City Council Speaker [Christine C. Quinn](#) said it would be naïve for any taxpayer-financed program to take its money for granted, particular given the city's economic troubles.

"We had to make tough decisions," said Ms. Quinn, adding that she gave the alliance \$5,000 from her discretionary fund. "And we decided to prioritize our funding to programs that were working directly with crime victims."

"Education and outreach is important work, but we had to make choices," she said.

Ms. Quinn said the budget still provided money to groups that help children who are abused and victims of domestic violence, who are often sexually assaulted. The council steered about \$4 million to groups that address domestic violence.


City Councilwoman [Julissa Ferreras](#), who represents several Queens neighborhoods and is chairwoman of the women's issues committee, said the cuts were unavoidable.

"I abhor these cuts and fought to restore them," Ms. Ferreras said in a statement. "Sexual assault is a major problem in our city and affects my district in particular. It's very frustrating."

"Unfortunately," she added, "the city is facing a budget crunch, and there are many vital programs getting axed. I hate to imagine where we are headed if we can't afford to pay for rape crisis centers. Is that the kind of city we want to live in?"

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