

Fair Funding for State's Human Services, Advocates Demand

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by Jonathan Adams (Staff)

BOSTON/State House - Advocates called on state legislators to support new funding for human services in Massachusetts in an annual rally and lobby day at the State House on Tuesday.

Over 600 human-services workers, their clients, and supporters from across the state packed the Great Hall for the event, before calling on their elected representatives to endorse around \$200 million in additional financing in the next budget.

Organized by the human services coalition Caring Force, the rally was addressed by a number of workers, clients, organizational leaders, and legislators.

Coleen Rapoza, a case manager at a service provider in Marshfield, Mass. called Road to Responsibility, thanked the legislature for existing funding that has allowed modest wage increases for human-service workers over the last several years.

"However," she says, "those increases barely keep up with inflation, and we have endured chronic underfunding for years. "Now our crucial programs that serve thousands of Massachusetts families, and the dedicated people who work with them, are desperately in need of additional funding in this year's budget," she continues.

State Senator Karen Spilka (D-Ashland), spoke in support of the funding increase and referred to the goals of the rally as a "major priority" for her. Spilka explains that she started her career as a social worker, and has a sister with Down's Syndrome and Alzheimer's disease, and who is a resident in a group home.

"I know what an incredibly important role you all play in helping not only all of the clients and consumers out there," to lead "self-sufficient, productive and independent lives; you also help all of the families, because you're helping their loved one; I personally thank you," says Spilka.

Jennifer Modica spoke about how services from Horace Mann Educational Associates (HMEA) in Franklin, Mass. have benefitted her son, Stephen.

"He's been in HMEA for three years," says Modica, "every day he comes home happy and excited about what he did for the day ... he helps clean the police and fire stations," as well as lawn care work.

"The staff at HMEA work hard to make sure that Stephen is doing jobs that he enjoys ... by talking with him, and planning with him; I see him continuing to grow and to learn all the time," she continues.

Though Stephen is in a program and receives transportation, "there is always a threat of the hours of the program being cut and transportation not being there," says Modica, "it's time for the legislature to step forward, and approve the money to increase the rates for programs like HMEA, so that parents like myself can rest easy that our child receives services they need."