



Human Service Agencies Upset over Governor's Veto

By Ryan Trowbridge

SOUTH HADLEY, Mass. (WGGB) — State human service workers are upset this week following one of Governor Deval Patrick's vetoes.

Many agencies were expecting to get a slight increase for employee salaries in order to gain and keep good workers.

Many in the health and human services industry are upset with this news.

On Sunday, Governor Patrick vetoed \$10 million in salary increases for workers in the field.

"For someone who is a Governor that truly cares about our communities in Western Mass. and specifically the vulnerable, this seems like a really unusual decision," says Leslie Laurie, CEO of Tapestry Health.

The proposal would have given \$20 million to 31,000 state contracted workers.

It would have only applied to workers who make under \$40,000 a year and would mean a two percent pay raise.

But Gov. Patrick only said yes to half of that.

"What we were asking is closer to \$60 million. There hasn't been an increase in state salary in over 5 years," adds Laurie.

Since 2009, there have been no standard of living increases for these workers.

Laurie says given their work and the relatively low salary, it's important to attract and keep good workers which is why she says they need this money.

"Some of the work that human service workers do is quite dangerous and is quite emotionally and physically challenging. Some of the workers could be paid more at a McDonald's but they're committed to the work that they do."

Instead Governor Patrick says he wants to use the other half of the money to fund an overhaul of the money the state spends for health and human services.

"It would seem that there were other places that the Governor could have chosen to balance the budget. Not on the backs of those providing critical services to the most vulnerable

Laurie says she and her colleagues are now working to get this veto overturned in order to get that full \$20 million for salaries.

Laurie also adds that although the government did not make any cuts to human services programs, they did not give additional funding that the agencies requested.