

Dorchester Reporter

700 rally for human service workers at State House

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Nearly 700 human service workers and advocates flooded Beacon Hill on Tuesday to push for \$260 million in funding for programs and overdue wages.

The rally was held in the Great Hall after which advocates and workers in gold shirts headed to lobby lawmakers for their budget requests under the banner of "The Caring Force," an initiative that highlights issues important to the human services sector.

"We need the Legislature to hear our collective voices," said Phil Carver, a member of the board of directors of Dorchester-based WORK Inc. and president of the Pope's Hill Civic Association. Headquartered on Beach Street, and focused on providing skills and employment for individuals with disabilities, WORK Inc. provided the catering for the rally.

"This is where the gold is," said state Rep. Gloria Fox, a Roxbury Democrat, in an allusion to the State House's golden dome. She noted that many incumbent lawmakers are running for reelection this year and advised advocates to remind her fellow legislators of that fact.

State Sen. Karen Spilka, an Ashland Democrat, echoed Fox, and called on advocates to keep the pressure on lawmakers as they work during the next few months on House and Senate versions of Gov. Deval Patrick's budget.

Michael Weekes, head of the human services-focused Providers' Council, said lawmakers have long pledged to provide more adequate funding, but delivery has been delayed due to the recession. "We think the commonwealth is in a good place to live up to its promise," he said on Tuesday. He added that some human service workers, eighty percent of whom are women, are working two and three jobs to make ends meet because of the low pay.