

Massachusetts human service workers lobby for payments at Statehouse



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By MICHAEL NORTON

BOSTON — With the Legislature focused on passing a \$500 million tax bill to boost investments in transportation, hundreds of human services workers visited the Statehouse Tuesday to demand funding for salary increases and increased rates for vendors promised under last year's health care quality and cost control law.

Representatives of workers who care for some of the state's most vulnerable residents say Gov. Deval Patrick's budget filed in January did not fund a \$16.7 million reserve to boost salaries of low-paid workers and provided about \$52 million of the \$140 million in human service vendor rate payments they say are due under the health care law, which critics argued was too costly and prescriptive in its approach to bringing down expenses.

Rep. Ruth Balser, D-Newton, noting the planned release of the House budget on Wednesday, thanked caregivers in the Great Hall for devoting themselves professionally to helping others, often for wages in the \$12 an hour range. "We know that you do arguably the most important job there is," Balser said.

According to the Providers' Council, more than 80 percent of jobs in the human services sector are held by women, with 185,000 workers in the sector serving about 660,000 people, or one in 10 residents.

In addition to the funding requests, the council is also pushing legislation enabling vendors to access health insurance for their workers through the state's Group Insurance Commission (H 933) and allowing certain workers to receive up to \$150 a month for up to four years to repay education loans (S 22).