

Mansfield area assistance agencies brace for deep cuts

JAMI KINTON • News Journal • February 15, 2011

MANSFIELD -- News of budget cuts to federally-funded programs didn't come as a shock to the District 5 Area Agency on Aging -- but it didn't make the proposals any easier to handle.

The release of President Barack Obama's budget Monday, and the proposed cuts in the Community Services Block Grant, could put a lot of local work at risk. The federal program provides core funding for locally-controlled programs that meet community needs.

In 2010, the Erie-Huron Counties Community Action Commission Inc., which also serves Richland County, fed 13,522 children and seniors in the three counties through the Summer Food Service and Senior Nutrition programs.

Cuts could hurt the action commission, along with programs such as Head Start, homeless and housing services, financial services, senior services and emergency services like the Home Energy Assistance Program.

"If they're going to cut senior services, it would impact all of our programs," said Diane Makley, chief of longterm care at the Area Agency on Aging in Mansfield. "We're not sure if they will cut from programs like Passport and our Title 3 funds, but these are federally-funded programs, so who knows?"

Another area of concern is the Home Energy Assistance Program administered by the Ohio Department of Development, designed to help low-income Ohioans meet the high costs of home heating. The program provides a one-time payment for Public Utilities Commission of Ohio regulated utility customers.

The Area Agency on Aging, which supports nine counties, including Richland, Crawford and Ashland, has handled an increasing number of energy assistance applications in recent years.

Makley said the local program, which costs about \$30,000, is completely funded by federal money.

"Without this money, there would be no HEAP,"

Makley said. "From what we're hearing, (the government) should be acting pretty quickly, if not making a decision now."

For 46 years, Ohio Heartland Community Action Commission has supported Marion, Crawford and Morrow county communities.

Some of its programming could be affected by federal cuts: the collaborative United Community Rx Program, the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program and the Salvation Army unit in Galion that provides a food and a clothing outlet.

"We hear whatever happens will happen quickly and impact people immediately," Makley said. "We knew cuts were going to happen, but the immediacy of it is hard to take. If they cut (HEAP) off Friday, are the applications already in going to be processed? It just puts so much in upheaval."

jkinton@nncogannett.com

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