

House proposes deep cuts in human services budget

By Ray LongTribune reporter

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SPRINGFIELD -- House lawmakers are proposing to cut social services \$368 million below current levels as they wrestle with how to protect the state's most vulnerable citizens during a money crunch, according to the chairman of the a key appropriations committee.

"We did the best we could," said Sara Feigenholtz, D-Chicago. "It's a very, very, very austere budget. No one is happy with this budget.

Major cuts in the proposal include about \$181 million from state operations and about \$186 million in cuts to grants, such as social services that go to private organizations in communities throughout the state, she said.

Even so, many of the cuts Gov. Pat Quinn proposed for community-based substance abuse and mental health programs would see some money restored for their programs, she said. That move would represent a nod to the notion that prevention and treatment saves money in the long run.

Programs Quinn put on the chopping block for senior citizens, such as the circuit breaker program, would fare better with the House plan, Feigenholtz said. Another program at least partially saved from elimination would be Illinois Cares RX, she said. The programs have provided property tax relief and assistance in paying for prescription drugs.

One additional cost-savings move would cut even deeper than Quinn proposed for programs that pay for Medicaid services provided by doctors, hospitals, nursing homes and pharmacies, she said.

Feigenholtz predicted the legislation would win approval in committee Wednesday and in the full House later this week. The Senate is working on a different track and has predicted more than \$1 billion in additional revenues to spend than the House has targeted for the overall state budget.

The proposal is for the budget year that begins July 1. The overall human services budget would go from \$12.378 billion in the current budget to about \$12.010 billion in the new budget, she said.