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\$30 Million "Mistake" May Cost 20,000 Illinois Residents Mental Health Care Services

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It's a \$30 million "oops."

It's an "oops" that could cost nearly 20,000 Illinois kids, mothers, grandmothers and others their mental health care services on July 1.

It's an "oops" that can only be fixed by the Illinois Senate within the next 24 hours.

How's that for a political thriller plot?

Except it's not a plot line. It's true.

When the Illinois House a few weeks ago approved its version of the Illinois fiscal year 2012 budget, [House Bill 3717](#), the legislation inadvertently slated funding for mental health care grants at \$114.2 million instead of \$143.6 million or 98.6% of the current year's funding.

State Rep. Sara Feigenholtz (D-Chicago), Chair of the House Human Services Committee, the panel that originally approved the mental health budget, discovered the error a few days before the legislature's May 31 adjournment. She raced legislation, [Senate Bill 2407 \(House Amendment #2\)](#), through the House on its last day of session, to win -- with overwhelming bi-partisan support, 109-7 -- restoration of the money.

The bill reach the Senate only a few hours before the midnight deadline -- and then stalled.

The rescue legislation, which is being sponsored in the Senate by State Senator Heather Steans (D-Chicago), fell victim to last-minute political budget maneuvering over capital construction funding and additional human services budget increases.

The leading Illinois mental health advocate group said that without Senate action on Feigenholtz's bill nearly 20,000 people would lose care.

"A \$30 million 'mistake' means that nearly low-income 20,000 children, mothers and men will lose community mental health care unless the Illinois Senate acts on Wednesday," said [Community Behavioral Healthcare Association of Illinois](#) CEO Frank Anselmo said.

"People who could harm themselves or harm others will suddenly be in a lurch with no care," Anselmo added. "There will be tragedy just waiting to happen."

A Chicago community mental health agency, [C4](#), located in Steans' district on the city's north side, would likely eliminate care for 3,100 neighborhood residents, says the agency's CEO.

"It costs about \$1,000 per year for C4 to serve children and adults with mental illness. The simple math is that about 3,100 people would be denied care on Chicago's north side," said C4's Tony Kopera.

The Illinois Senate returns to Springfield for a 24-hour session to address the state capital construction bill and a few other lingering pieces of business. Both Senate President John Cullerton (D-Chicago) and GOP Minority Leader Christine Radogno are aware of the problem and the fix, sources say.

Because all bills require a 3/5th vote in each chamber after May 31, all 35 Democratic senators and at least one GOP senator would need to vote for the bill. Cullerton and Radagno would need to corral their colleagues to back the bill.

And Feigenholtz is begging the Senate to act.

"I am pleading with the Democratic and Republican members of the Illinois Senate to approve the legislation, which won overwhelming bi-partisan support in the House, to keep mental health care services intact for thousands of residents," said Feigenholtz.

The Senate begins its session at high noon.

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