

Governor, agencies ask lawmakers to restore millions to state budget

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SPRINGFIELD -- Gov. Pat Quinn, the Illinois Gaming Board and other state agencies want the legislature to restore hundreds of millions of dollars in spending to the state budget when the General Assembly returns later this month for its annual veto session.

The chairs of the five House appropriations received a document -- first reported in Capitol Fax, a political newsletter and blog -- laying out dozens of requests.

Rep. Sara Feigenholtz, D-Chicago, chairwoman of the appropriations committee that allocates money for human services, said the list simply lays out potential options. Whatever additional spending is eventually approved will have to be offset, however, to remain within the \$33.2 billion spending cap approved by the House earlier this year. The same cap was adopted by the Senate, by default, when it approved the House budget.

"This is a moving target. There are a lot of things on the table," Feigenholtz said. "We have a great deal of pressure from a variety of agencies that got cut."

Kelly Kraft, a spokeswoman for the governor's budget office, described the requests as "a mix of discussions, draft calculations and requests."

How much additional spending can be approved will depend in part on how the legislature deals with the governor's \$376 million in line-item vetoes from the budget lawmakers adopted. If legislators do not override any of those vetoes, that amount will be available to spend.

The veto session is to run from Oct. 25 through Oct. 27 and Nov. 8 through Nov. 10.

"There are just so many variables," Feigenholtz said. "If there is not an override do we reallocate that money?"

The list is a result of a months-long examination of the budget by agencies in the executive branch, she said, and it will mean significant tinkering with the fiscal year 2012 budget in the middle of the fiscal year.

However, Feigenholtz said, the size of the cuts made by legislators last year meant major adjustments were inevitable.

"We'll be retooling the budget more than we have in decades. I think there are some things (needed) just for certain agencies to complete their functions," she said. "Each of the agency directors have had to live with these cuts and manage them, and they've put together a bucket list of what they can't do without."

Some programs are more likely to have their funding restored than others, particularly those where federal funding is involved.

"There were, for instance, dollars needed for operation for the Linkcard (food stamps)," Feigenholtz said. "I would consider that low-hanging fruit."

Kraft said the administration continues to discuss with lawmakers ways of adjusting the budget.

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More funding?

Among the programs on a list given to House lawmakers requesting restored funding:

--\$17.2 million for the Monetary Award Program (grants to college students)

--\$35 million for a backlog in estate tax refunds

--\$49 million for the Illinois Gaming Board, requested if the governor signs the pending gambling bill

--\$89 million to restore school transportation reimbursements

--\$36 million for the Department of Corrections

--\$10 million for indigent burials

--\$75 million for the transition of people with mental health and developmental disabilities out of state institutions to community-based facilities

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