



Temperatures dropping. Will the state restore funding for homeless shelters?

By **MeganCottrell**, today at 8:00 am

It's supposed to be another record year for Chicago winter. Forecasters are predicting extreme cold and record snowfall again. Thought 2011's snowpocalypse was just a fluke? Apparently not.

While the 50-plus inches of snow we may receive will inconvenience a lot of us and perhaps drain the city's snow removal coffers, if you live on the street, the freezing temperatures and blizzard conditions won't be just another snow day. They're life-threatening.

The 2012 budget passed by the state legislature and signed by Gov. Pat Quinn earlier this year [cuts funding for homeless prevention services by 52 percent](#), eliminating \$4.7 million for shelters, emergency housing and transportation. Homeless advocates are fighting for that funding to be restored, but neither party seems optimistic about that happening.

Numbers from the [Chicago Coalition for the Homeless](#) indicate that more people were turned away from homeless services last year than were taken in. That's 45,673 turn-aways compared with 40,542 intakes. It's a phenomenon sweeping communities throughout the region.

“Eighty to 100 more people were sleeping on the street because we had to delay our shelter opening by two weeks due to funding cuts,” Lynda Schueler, executive director of West Suburban PADS, a shelter and housing provider, wrote in a recent press release.

Ed Shurna, executive director of Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, said the cuts will affect the state's most vulnerable residents.

"This is the only safety net that some people have. At the same time that these programs have been cut and more people are sleeping on the streets, the state is subsidizing horse breeders to the tune of \$4.1 million," Shurna said. "We could restore these vital services with that amount of money."

But are Illinois politicians interested in restoring the needed funds? State Rep. Sara Feigenholtz, chair of the House Human Services Appropriation Committee, said she would push for the funds to be restored in the fall veto session, which began last week, according to homeless advocates. But state Sen. Heather Steans, chair of the Senate appropriations committee, said, even though she and many other Democrats want funding restored, it looks unlikely.

"It's certainly on my list, but it's really the question of timing. I'm not sure if we're going to be able to accomplish that," said Steans, who noted that the veto session requires a super-majority to get anything passed. "We would need Republican support."

Still, Steans said, restoring funding in areas like homeless prevention is important.

"Budgets speak to your values," she added. "A disproportionate number of cuts are on people on the margins. We are going to end up increasing homelessness."

Are state Republicans interested in restoring services? Patty Schuh, spokeswoman for Senate Republican leader Christine Radogno, said she thinks these claims by Democrats lack sincerity, since they know the money isn't there.

"The state doesn't have enough money for the budget we already have," Schuh said. "We can't just start adding to a budget that we already can't afford."

Noting that the state is seriously behind in paying service providers and businesses already, Schuh said making more promises the state can't keep would be troubling.

"We truly believe that social service providers and businesses and citizens need some predictability and stability," Schuh said. "If we tell you you're going to get \$5, you're going to get \$5, not \$2.50."

And subsidizing horse breeders?

Neither party had an answer to that.

The forecast for weather doesn't look good. And neither does the forecast for restoring funding for those who will be left out in the cold.

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