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City homeless services restored

By Hal Dardick

Clout Street

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Chicago plans to resume providing full overnight services to homeless people seeking help in the wee hours of the morning after state lawmakers restored funding for those types of programs across Illinois.

But it's unclear how quickly that can happen because the city is trying to determine how fast the money will start flowing, said Evelyn Diaz, commissioner of the Department of Family and Support Services.

"Our intent is absolutely to fully restore the funds, to fully restore the overnight emergency services team," Diaz said.

Earlier this year, the city lost \$2.3 million in state funding, but that money would be restored under a larger set of budget adjustments to help the state's less fortunate that were approved Tuesday.

After the initial cuts, the city eliminated 22 Family and Support Services jobs and decreased the number of shelter beds across the city by about 300, Diaz said. It also eliminated overnight homeless outreach crews between 12 a.m. and 8 a.m.

Two overnight service workers continued to take 311 calls from the homeless and help them find shelter, but rides to those shelters were halted. That resulted in an outcry from aldermen, and Mayor **Rahm Emanuel** found \$200,000 to provide some overnight help to the homeless from Nov. 15 until temperatures warmed up again.

The money was being used to "provide really limited service during that overnight shift so that we could get to really priority cases — crisis cases — during the winter months," Diaz said. "We never saw that as sustainable, because it's overtime."

Once the state money comes in, the city will put the 22 jobs back in the budget and fill them, first by recalling workers who were laid off, as required under a union contract.

"We did not expect full funding restoration, but it just couldn't come at a better time with the cold winter months lying ahead," Diaz said, crediting Emanuel, and state Rep. **Sara Feigenholtz** and state Sen. Heather Steans for pushing the restoration through.

"We're just relieved that we're going to have our full team ready to respond," Diaz added. "This is a real win for our most vulnerable residents, and it's a win for our staff who are able to return to work."