



Not A Misprint: Homeless Services Expanded In New State Budget

Matthew Blake Tuesday June 5th, 2012, 5:07pm

Despite the drumbeat of fiscal austerity that lead to other significant social service cuts, the Illinois General Assembly last week actually passed a budget for next year with meaningful increases – yes, increases – in money for key state programs to help the homeless, and those in danger of becoming homeless.

The state did this through taking money from a trust fund reserved for affordable housing. In an ideal world for homeless service providers, money to fund their work would have come from general revenue funds.

But there was enough [trust fund money](#) – which comes from the real estate transfer tax – to transfer cash to homeless programs while keeping about \$29 million in the fund, which will presumably go toward future affordable housing projects for low-income residents.

According to an [analysis](#) by Housing Action Illinois, total spending on homeless service budget line items will climb from \$37.6 million in fiscal year 2012 to \$43.9 million in fiscal year 2013, which begins July 1.

The spending includes:

- * The Homeless Prevention Program, which gives people in danger of becoming homeless one-time cash assistance, more than doubled its funding from \$1.5 million in the current fiscal year to \$4 million in the next fiscal year.
- * Money specifically [targeted to homeless youth](#) increased \$900,000 to \$4 million.
- * Overall supportive housing services increased \$3 million to \$26.7 million. This is the main state program that [assists residents](#) in receiving permanent housing and access to mental health services, if needed.
- * Some \$9.1 million was kept in funding for emergency and transition housing from last fiscal year.

As [Progress Illinois reported](#), advocates directed their lobbying efforts this spring on opposing a \$4.7 million – or 52 percent – cut proposed by the governor. The money goes to services like homeless shelters and emergency overnight services.

Advocates worked this spring with Springfield appropriators, such as State Rep. Sarah Feigenholtz (D-Chicago), chairperson of the House Human Services Appropriations Committee.

Julie Dworkin, policy director for the Chicago Coalition of the Homeless, says that her group was able to mobilize more homeless service supporters and lawmakers this year – perhaps because people were [mobilized for a fight](#) after experiencing a similar proposal from Quinn last year to cut emergency and transition housing.

Also, Chicago advocates spent more time last year at City Hall than at the Capitol Dome, rallying for a “[Sweet Home Chicago](#)” ordinance that would have set aside Tax Increment Finance money for affordable housing. A watered down version of the measure passed the city council last spring.

“With Sweet Home Chicago, we were not putting as many resources into our Springfield advocacy,” Dworkin says. “We were able to organize a lot more people this year.”