



Lutheran Social Services of Illinois

NEWS RELEASE

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General Assembly Applauded for Restoring Substance Abuse Treatment Cuts; Swift Action from Governor Still Needed to Save Programs

(CHICAGO) Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI) today applauded the General Assembly's move to restore \$55 million in cuts to existing substance abuse treatment programs, but the organization also warned that swift action is still needed by Governor Blagojevich to save drug treatment and prevention programs throughout the state. LSSI recently announced program closures and cuts as well as lay-offs forced by Blagojevich's veto of \$55 million in funding for substance abuse treatment programs across the state in July. The General Assembly approved legislation Tuesday to restore that funding by sweeping excess revenue from a variety of special interest funds. LSSI says it can't begin restoring programs or rehiring workers until Governor Blagojevich signs the new legislation into law, and that every day the Governor delays will make it much harder to reinstitute those programs.

"Yesterday, when the Illinois Senate passed two bills to restore funding for substance abuse treatment and other essential human service programs, they took a huge step in support of Illinois families. Today we and other service providers are one step closer to re-opening our doors to more than 40,000 Illinoisans in need of addiction treatment services," said the Reverend Frederick Aigner, president of Lutheran Social Services of Illinois.

"We have one last hurdle to clear — Governor Blagojevich must now sign the bills," Aigner continued. "Now that the General Assembly has provided a funding stream, we hope the Governor will restore funding for our programs as soon as possible so we can get on with our vital work of helping people move toward recovery and building healthier families and communities."

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Two weeks ago, LSSI announced the lay-off of 27 frontline workers and severe program cuts as a result of the Governor's budget cuts. Most of LSSI's cuts come to six residential treatment programs in Chicago and Elgin, which will be forced to turn away one in four patients if the Governor doesn't immediately sign the new legislation. In addition, due to the Governor's cuts, LSSI closed Project SAFE, located in Chicago. Project SAFE protects children and strengthens and reunites families by providing drug and alcohol treatment for mothers through the Department of Children and Family Services.

Those cuts could be reversed by legislation approved unanimously by the Illinois Senate on Tuesday. However, Governor Blagojevich has up to 60 days to sign the new measures into law. Any delay by the Governor would jeopardize LSSI's ability to reverse the cuts, in addition to forcing other providers across the state to close their doors to more than 40,000 Illinoisans.

"If Governor Blagojevich doesn't act immediately to sign the budget restorations into law, he will have effectively vetoed the measure a second time," Aigner said. "Illinois can't wait 60 days for the Governor to do the right thing. Once our highly skilled treatment staff move on to other jobs, providers close programs and cancel leases, and people in need have fallen through the cracks and hit bottom, the damage is already done," concluded Aigner.

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About Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI)

Founded in October 1867, LSSI is a statewide, not-for-profit social service agency of the three Illinois synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. LSSI serves people through an array of services at 89 sites across Illinois. LSSI provides substance abuse treatment programs and services at sites in Chicago, Dixon, Elgin, Schaumburg and Sterling.