

## Human service workers renew call for wage funding

By Thomas Pudney

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ALBANY — A coalition representing more than 350 nonprofit organizations is renewing its call for state contracts to fund a higher minimum wage and cost-of-living pay adjustments for the state's contracted human services employees.

Strong Nonprofits for a Better New York used the occasion of National Women's History Month to rally in the state Capitol to induct its inaugural class of 38 female human service sector workers into its "Human Services Hall of Fame" and push legislators and Gov. Andrew Cuomo to include these funding requests in his final budget.

"Frontline human services employees are predominantly women, and nearly half are women of color," said Allison Sesso, executive director of the Human Services Council. "If we really care about pay equity, our state leaders need to step up and fully fund wages for the hundreds of thousands of women providing vital services for their communities on behalf of the government."

The group is asking the state to add \$23 million in annual funding for the human services sector to pay for a \$15 minimum wage that's coming to the state in 2019. They are also requesting an additional \$65 million for cost-of-living increases for employees in the sector who were not covered by last year's budget.

While the governor mandated a wage hike, the funds to implement the raises are not reflected in the size of state contracts for human services providers and have not been included in this year's budget. That leaves nonprofits searching for a way to meet the mandate, says the coalition.

State Sen. David Carlucci (D-Clarkstown) could not confirm that the funding would be included in the Senate's one-house budget, but did say that should it fall out of the budget, he would work to advance a measure to address the funding in a standalone bill before the end of session.

"Human services are the backbone of New York state, but unfortunately, it's not the sexiest issue," Carlucci said. "And because we are talking about the most vulnerable people in the state, they don't have the advocacy that other groups have."

Despite a majority having associate or bachelor's degrees, nearly 60 percent of the human services workforce qualifies for public assistance, said Executive Director of the Fiscal Policy Institute Ron Deutsch.

"The governor has failed to deliver a cost of living increase to these workers for eight years and has chosen not to increase state contracts to reflect the rising minimum wage," Deutsch said. "If he is serious about addressing the gender pay gap, he needs to start in his own backyard."

The governor's office did not respond to a request for comment.

As part of the 2016-17 budget process, Cuomo signed a minimum wage increase that will bring New York's rate to \$15 by the end of 2019.

The group says that the piecemeal way in which cost-of-living increases have been implemented — with some portions of the nonprofit workforce, like direct care providers, getting raises while others do not — has made it difficult for human services providers to retain their best employees.

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