

Nonprofits want budget to include funding for wage mandates

By Thomas Pudney

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ALBANY — A coalition of nonprofits held a "half baked" protest in the Legislative Office Building on Tuesday in an effort to draw attention to what it says is the underfunding of the state's nonprofit contractors.

The group, Strong Nonprofits for a Better New York, represents more than 350 nonprofit organizations. Members handed out cookies with missing bites, displayed dilapidated gingerbread houses and handed out a menu outlining perceived inadequacies in the state's investment in the nonprofit sector.

"Our workforce hasn't received a cost-of-living adjustment in over eight years," said Michelle Jackson, deputy director for the Human Services Council of New York. "Just a portion of our workforce got [a] wage adjustment last year. If part of the workforce needs it, the rest of it needs it, too."

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

The problem, says Jackson, is that 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 without compromising the quality of care they provide, she said.

In a letter sent to Cuomo on Wednesday, the group said 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.

"Workers in hospitals, schools, and government earn on average 20 to 40 percent more than their nonprofit counterparts," the letter reads. "Direct care is one piece of that puzzle, but last year's investment will not help the day care workers, senior service providers, and many more that will not be touched by the increase."

The group acknowledges that some important steps have been taken, namely the Nonprofit Infrastructure Capital Investment Program, which funds projects current contracts do not support. But, the group says, it falls short of addressing the sizable need felt by the organization's 200,000 nonprofit employees, funding 237 grants of 635 submitted to the program.

"I don't think nonprofits should fundraise to fill the gap in government contracts," added Jackson. "The government wants these services, people in New York rely on them, so the government should pay the full cost of these services."

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