

LETTER: Save human services, 03-24-08

The Herald News

Posted Mar 23, 2008 @ 12:00 AM

Imagine that you and your family decided to fulfill a longstanding dream of owning a business.

You opened your doors in 1987 and began Wiley's Wheelchair Repair Service. You charged a competitive rate, promised not to raise prices each year and offered discounts to long-term customers who relied on your services every day. Initially, you covered your inflationary costs by not giving staff raises. You became more cost-conscious by switching to cheaper health insurance, freezing training, upping health insurance co-pays and capping employee mileage costs.

Your business grew, as did your operating and employee costs, but you had a harder time recruiting and retaining employees. Running out of ways to reduce costs without diminishing your service, you made the difficult decision to raise your rates. But the government stepped in and denied the increase, stating it would be a hardship to your customers. You began to ask your family and friends for money to keep your doors open. Next, you went to the general public, showing the need for your vital service and some responded favorably. Many of your employees had to take on a second job to keep up with living expenses and then a recession hit. What would you do next?

This is the position so many human service organizations find themselves in today. There has not been a statewide adjustment to rates for human services since 1987! Yet, we all experience at least a 3 percent increase in costs each year. Just in 2008, analysts predict that gasoline, heating costs, food and utilities will increase by at least 10 percent.

Statewide, one in six people require the services of a human service organization. This means that nearly every family will rely on a human service professional — either for short-term issues or for long-term services. To meet the needs of the commonwealth, more than 1,100 community agencies employ more than 185,000 staff members who help the state's most vulnerable populations. Human services are necessary, and at times, a critical service to more than a million people.

There is a solution. Protect the delivery of services by supporting Senate Bill 65, The Campaign to Strengthen Human Services. It establishes a system for fair rates to ensure quality services.

Call your legislator, write to Gov. Patrick and talk to your neighbors. Fixing this antiquated rate system will ensure that everyone throughout the commonwealth — like your child, your father or mother, and one day yourself — will be well cared for now and into the future.

Please support Senate Bill 65 and strengthen human services for all.

*Donna Sabecky
Harwich*

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