

Lake County News-Sun

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CAP protests big loss proposed in federal budget

By Judy Masterson

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Juanita Brown of North Chicago (standing left) and Marsha Hudson of Waukegan cheer a speaker protesting a proposed federal budget cut at a Community Action Partnership rally in Waukegan . | Michael Schmidt~Sun-Times Media

Who benefits?

The Community Services Block Grant program provided services to 20.7 million low-income people in 2009, including 5 million children, 2.3 million seniors, 1.7 million people with disabilities and 3.7 million people who lacked health insurance. For more information on Community Action Partnership agencies around the state, visit www.iacaanet.org or call (217) 789-0125.

Community Action agencies around the state are fighting a federal budget proposal to slash their funding by half, and on Tuesday, a bus tour rolled into Waukegan for a rally attended by more than 200.

“We’re here today to demand that our legislators put people first as they debate over the nation’s budget,” Dalitso Sulamoyo, president and CEO of the Illinois Association of Community Action Agencies, told a cheering crowd at the CAP office at 1200 Glen Flora Ave.

“We need to remind legislators that it’s morally reprehensible to balance the budget on the backs of poor people. We ask that our voices be heard from Waukegan, to Zion to Washington, D.C.,” Sulamoyo said.

Community Action Partnership of Lake County uses federal Community Service Block Grant funds, funneled through the state, to provide services including Head Start preschool, financial assistance for rent, utilities and prescriptions, before- and after-school care and a retired senior volunteer program.

A 50 percent cut would deny services to 870 people next year, according to CAP Lake County Executive Director Mary Lockhart White.

“Community Action is about serving the family and the community,” White said. “We are a system that works for each individual and family in need.”

Speakers at the rally also included Waukegan Township Supervisor Patricia Jones, who warned that 13,000 seniors would be affected by the proposed cuts.

North Chicago Mayor Leon Rockingham also warned against the cuts, as did Lake County Board Commissioner Angelo Kyle, a pastor, who presented an impromptu sermon.

“When people don’t have heat in their homes, they need action,” Kyle yelled. “When there’s no food on their tables, no clothes on their backs, no roof over their heads, they need some action!”

Kyle also decried budget priorities that reveal a nation “willing to spend billions of dollars on wars overseas but not on the war on poverty.”

Lake County Jail Chief Jennifer Witherspoon, who grew up in the Robert Taylor homes in Chicago, also spoke.

“Programs like CAP that helped us in the ghetto helped me be who I am today,” Witherspoon said. “If CAP is cut, it will be felt in the jails, where we will get more inmates because of lack of jobs and lack of resources.”

People who have been helped by CAP also spoke, including a formerly homeless man who underscored the importance of the agency in providing funding to partner agencies including PADS Crisis Services Inc., Catholic Charities and the Salvation Army.

“It’s emotional for me,” said the man, who said his name was Earl. “When you don’t have a place to go, you feel hopeless. Now I can go home and turn the key in my door.”

Lucille Hood of Waukegan said she turned to CAP for help in paying her utilities after her husband was placed in a nursing home.

“This is the first time I ever had to ask anybody for anything,” she said. “There’s a lot of people who need help. I just pray, don’t cut CAP.”