



Feigenholtz Says Quinn Will Protect ADAP

by Gary Barlow
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Ill. State Rep. Sara Feigenholtz (D-Chicago) said last week she's confident that Gov. Pat Quinn (D) will find a way to fund Illinois' AIDS Drug Assistance Program so it doesn't have to turn people away.

"There has been a lot of discussion going on in the governor's office about ADAP," Feigenholtz said May 25. "He is committed to funding the program."

Feigenholtz has been a staunch guardian of ADAP in the Illinois Legislature. The program provides HIV medications to low-income people living with HIV/AIDS. The bill for those medications can run as high as \$20,000 per person per year, but advocates say that's cheaper than treating them for illnesses they'd get and providing other services they'd need without the medications.

"This has been one of the most successful programs we've had in the state of Illinois because it keeps people healthy and keeps them in the workforce," Feigenholtz said.

As of last month, 4,391 Illinoisans received medications through ADAP, with more than 100 new applicants each month. Because of the budget woes confronting state government, though, ADAP faces an estimated \$9.68-million shortfall in the coming year. That prompted the ADAP Medical Issues Advisory Board, which makes ADAP recommendations to the Illinois Department of Public Health, to recommend May 21 that ADAP be closed to new applicants and institute a waiting list, as 11 other states have done.

"People of color will be most impacted by a closed program and waiting list," said Rev. Doris Green, of the AIDS Foundation of Chicago. "Two out of three people using Illinois ADAP are African American or Latino. People of color are disproportionately impacted by HIV and they tend to be diagnosed at later stages of disease than their white counterparts. An ADAP waiting list will only worsen existing health disparities."

Whether that happens largely depends on whether Quinn finds a way to fully fund ADAP. He has broad discretionary powers on spending in the next fiscal year because the Legislature passed a budget last week that's billions of dollars in the hole and largely leaves it up to him to allocate funds and make cuts to deal with the deficit.

The Center for Tax and Budget Accountability released an analysis May 26 that showed a 26.7-percent deficit in general revenue funds in the FY2011 state budget. That comes to about \$7 billion. Ninety percent of general revenue funds are spent on four things: Healthcare, education, human services and public safety, meaning that spending in those areas will have to be cut extensively.

But Feigenholtz said she's discussed the issue extensively with the governor and his aides and believes he'll keep ADAP funding coming.

"I just talked to the governor's office," Feigenholtz said late May 25 as the House neared a vote on the budget. "ADAP is a high priority for him and I'm sure he'll keep his word."

Advocates are also seeking more federal funding for ADAP programs throughout the country.



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