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S.F. mayor promises L'Chaim funding at City Hall rally

by dan pine, staff writer

For Gayle Zahler, draconian state budget cuts that go into effect Dec. 1 mean only one thing: potential disaster for scores of elderly Jews under her charge at the S.F.-based Jewish Family and Children's Services.

That's why she and representatives from other local social service agencies that support the elderly rallied on the steps of San Francisco City Hall on Oct. 20 to demand that state and local governments do something about it.

"We rallied because adult day health care [centers] throughout the city will lose all funding that supports the services," said Zahler, associate director of JFCS. "We wanted to bring this to the attention of the local government."

The rally succeeded on that front, as Mayor Ed Lee not only attended but also announced a \$3.4 million grant to prevent San Francisco's adult day health care centers from shuttering Dec. 1. That includes a one-time \$600,000 grant to JFCS. The funds will come from the city's reserve for state budget impacts.



L'Chaim program director Anna Borovik addresses crowd at S.F. City Hall, accompanied by Radema Klibaner, a client of the adult day health care center. photo/courtesy of jfcs

While appreciative of the bridge funding, Zahler said it is "not enough to be able to continue to provide a baseline level of service. We still need to make up \$2.4 million."

Unless the funding comes through, JFCS will be forced to close its L'Chaim Adult Day Health Center. The Sunset District center serves 400 frail and elderly Jews, many of whom would be left housebound and isolated without it.

"These cuts mean seniors who at this point are kept safely at home and out of nursing home care would lose the services of this program: medical supplies, meals, nursing care, physical therapy, social work, coordination of medical care, as well as socialization," Zahler said. "All those services will be gone."

The state budget passed in March eliminated funding for 300 adult day health care centers in California, including L'Chaim. In July, Gov. Jerry Brown vetoed legislation that would have funded a scaled-down version of the program.

Zahler said she is optimistic about a newly launched campaign to raise \$3 million for JFCS. If the fundraising succeeds, the agency will be able to make up the shortfall.

If not, there is a Plan B, but even Zahler admitted it is not optimum.

"We're hoping to have in place case management, so no one falls through the cracks," she said. "We hope to have some program at a different level of services and hours per week. It's very sad that a system of care that was working, that had been put in place over decades, is being taken apart."