New York City Activists Rally Against Proposed HIV/AIDS Cuts

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AIDS activists groups are protesting New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg's proposal to cut 248 of the 850 HIV/AIDS Service Administration (HASA) case managers in an effort to close a $4.9 billion deficit in the city's 2011 fiscal year budget, *Gay City News* reports. HASA is a unit of the Human Resources Administration (HRA).

"If the mayor's proposal to eliminate over 200 HASA case managers went through, it would be the doomsday scenario," Armen H. Merjian, senior staff attorney at New York City–based AIDS service organization Housing Works, said during a March 8 protest at City Hall. "If he cuts hundreds of case managers, people will not get their food stamps, their Medicaid, their housing—they will suffer, and they will die."

A 1997 law requiring HASA to assign no more than 34 clients to each case manager could delay the proposed cuts. Nearly 10 years ago, Housing Works sued then-Mayor Rudy Giuliani, claiming HASA was denying clients access to benefits. The suit resulted in HRA's compliance in 2001 to the 1997 rule.

During a City Council hearing this week, Robert Doar, HRA's commissioner, said the job eliminations would slightly bump the number of clients each case manager handles from 29 to 32 or 33, but the six council members in attendance disapproved of any case management cuts.

"In the past, the council has shown support for these programs," said Matthew Lesieur, director of public policy at Village Care of New York. "Usually when the council shows support for something, you've just got to get it to do the right thing."

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