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## Social services will get \$23.7M

Measure now goes to Lingle, who is urged to release the funds

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Providers said yesterday that the state's safety net for the most vulnerable will be noticeably repaired thanks to a \$23.7 million appropriation from the "rainy-day" fund.

But they warned that the appropriation, which legislators agreed to yesterday in House and Senate votes, won't undo all of the damage done by state cutbacks to services. And they said continued high demand for aid will still far exceed resources.

"This goes a long way," said Alex Santiago, executive director of PHOCUSED, a consortium of social service nonprofits. "While we're relieved and pleased ... the sector is still dealing with cuts. There are still needs that are growing in the community."

The rainy-day money will be funneled to 39 social service programs statewide — from Housing First, which moves the chronically homeless into long-term housing, to Healthy Start, a child abuse prevention program that was in danger of being eliminated.

Also funded will be services for domestic violence victims, the mentally ill and developmentally disabled, along with meal and respite programs for the elderly, child care programs and a host of services for the poor, including legal aid and cash benefits.

Lawmakers left about \$26 million in the rainy-day fund.

The appropriation now goes to Gov. Linda Lingle to be released. Advocates yesterday urged her not to hold onto the money.

"This (fund) was set up for a day like today," Santiago said. "To say we're relieved is an understatement."

Throughout the legislative session, lawmakers appeared ready to use rainy-day dollars to help end teacher furloughs or to help cover the budget deficit. But advocates pushed hard for rainy-day funds to go to social services, and lawmakers were able to hammer out a \$67 million deal to end teacher furloughs that relied on the state's hurricane relief fund.

## GOP objections

Last legislative session, service providers made a similar plea for money from the rainy-day fund — also known as the Emergency and Budget Reserve Fund — but were largely denied. Legislators did tap into the fund to appropriate \$14 million for public hospitals and \$8 million for mental health programs.

In floor debate yesterday, lawmakers said tapping the rainy-day fund was the right thing to do at a time when many social service providers are seeing more requests for aid and fewer dollars from the state, public donations and other sources.

State Sen. Suzanne Chun Oakland, D-13th (Kalihi, Nu'uuanu), said the rainy-day fund was created to provide a temporary source of financing during an economic downturn or other emergency.

"The economic crisis has left many of the most vulnerable members of our society in jeopardy," she said. "There are many critical public services that will continue to help people with the passage of this bill."

But state Sen. Sam Slom, R-8th (Kāhala, Hawai'i Kai), who opposed the bill, said the social-service programs have become too dependent on an ever-expanding state government for survival.

"We have so many agencies, so many people dependent on this government and, meanwhile, the government has done nothing to change its direction substantially," he said.

Howard Garval, president and chief executive officer of Child and Family Service, said the rainy-day appropriation will help salvage programs that have seen severe cuts.

His organization expects to see rainy-day dollars for its Healthy Start, domestic violence, employment and seniors programs.

"The legislators really saw that the need was great," Garval said, adding that the session started out with predictions about more major cuts to social services. "Providers are breathing a sigh of relief."

A big winner in the rainy-day appropriation was Kupuna Care, which helps frail elderly people with housekeeping, transportation, case management and other services. The program is set to get \$3 million in rainy-day dollars to address a long waiting list for services.

Barbara Kim Stanton, AARP Hawai'i state director, said Kupuna Care is a vital resource for many seniors who couldn't live alone without it. AARP rallied along with other advocates for seniors at the state Capitol this session to boost the funding to Kupuna Care and to senior centers, which will get \$950,000 in rainy-day funds.

"They really heard the message," Stanton said.

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