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Nonprofits seek more support

Coalition doesn't want lawmakers to forget need for human services

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Nonprofit leaders came out in matching T-shirts for yesterday's special session of the Legislature to remind lawmakers that they're hurting — and so are their clients.

The leaders sat in on veto override discussions and held a quick gathering in the Capitol's courtyard to share their concerns about cuts to human services programs. They say the fiscal crisis and cuts to state spending are disproportionately hurting the poor.

"What's not been, I think, fully discussed is the human cost," said Alex Santiago, executive director of PHOCUSED, a consortium of nonprofits. Santiago, wearing a neon yellow PHOCUSED T-shirt along with about 15 other nonprofit employees, said that lawmakers and the governor need to do more to protect society's neediest.

"As this economic crisis continues to worsen, what we're finding is the numbers of those who are vulnerable are growing ... and people are not able to access the care that they need" because of cuts to programs and big layoffs at nonprofits, Santiago said. PHOCUSED stands for Protecting Hawaii's Ohana, Children, Under Served, Elderly and Disabled.

The gathering came on the heels of news that Healthy Start, a state child abuse prevention program that drew national recognition, is being cut because of fiscal woes.

The cut has spurred dozens of layoffs at non-profits that provide Healthy Start services. The program helps about 4,000 families, offering home visits, parenting lessons and other services to prevent child abuse.

Katrina Pasion, a senior family support worker at a Child and Family Service Healthy Start program in Wai'anae, said the cuts to the program are disappointing at a time when more families are grappling with greater financial strains.

"No matter where you live, there are at-risk youth," she said.
