

Jewish Community Caught in State Budget Woes

By Jackie Headapohl
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Jewish community stands to lose funding if Governor Gretchen Whitmer and Republicans don't negotiate state budget issues.

Some Jewish communal agencies in Metro Detroit are holding their breath as Democratic Gov. Gretchen Whitmer and the Republican-led legislature continue to hammer out state budget issues.

The reason for their angst is an item in the Department of Health and Human Services' (DHHS) budget for state funding of various human service agencies, like the Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services, the Chaldean Community Foundation, the Arab American-

Chaldean Council and the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit. As of now, those organizations stand to lose half the funding they usually get from the state.

For the Jewish community, the impact would be about \$2 million that is usually allocated to Jewish Family Service, JVS, Jewish Community Center, JARC, Kadima and Friendship Circle, according to David Kurzman, senior director, community and donor relations at Federation.

“Not a single cut has been made in any of these agencies,” Kurzman said. “We’re still hoping these funds are restored.”

Also in limbo is the Holocaust Memorial Center in Farmington Hills, which stands to lose \$500,000 in state funding if negotiations fail between the governor’s office and the state legislature to address the issue in supplemental spending bills.

What Happened?

Historically, both political parties have supported state funding for these kinds of human service agencies, the Holocaust Memorial Center and other entities, like the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History and the Arab American National Museum in Dearborn. However, this year’s budget process was somewhat unusual.

One week before the budget deadline, the Republican-led legislature sent its \$59.9 billion budget to Whitmer, without her input, after budget negotiations between the two had broken down during the summer.

To meet the budget deadline and avoid a government shutdown, Whitmer line-item vetoed nearly \$1 billion of the nearly \$60 billion budget and shifted \$625 million within state departments through the State Administrative Board to better reflect her priorities.

Whitmer then said she wanted to negotiate a supplemental spending bill with Republicans to allocate the \$947 million left over after her vetoes.

Multicultural Service Agencies Monies

According to State Sen. Jeremy Moss, D-11th District, the Republican budget did not provide enough funds for the state to meet new Medicaid work requirements, which is why Whitmer transferred funds within the DHHS budget, resulting in the loss of funding for multicultural human service agencies.

Whitmer’s Communications Director Zack Pohl said in a statement to the *Jewish News*: “The budgets passed by the Republican legislature were fatally flawed and included massive cuts to essential state services that would force tens of thousands of Michiganders to lose access to health care and jeopardize public safety.”

According to State Rep. Ryan Berman, R-39th District, who says he supports state funding for multicultural organizations, it was included in the Republican budget. “Whitmer used the Administrative Board to transfer the money to her other funding priorities,” he said.

According to Pohl, Whitmer supports funding for multicultural service agencies “and her budget reflected those priorities,” he said. “The governor had to make tough decisions to keep our

families and communities safe and help Michiganders access critical services that they rely on every day.”

Moss said he has been assured by the governor that restoring the funds is a priority. “Programs created by these multicultural organizations serve vulnerable populations by helping people before they need state support, saving the state money in the long run,” Moss said. “This must be addressed quickly so Federation can continue to provide support to vulnerable members of our Jewish community.”

Kurzmann said Federation is hopeful the cuts will be restored. “We don’t think this is a done deal. We’re doing everything we can to get the funding restored, working with allies in both parties, and we’re under the impression there is a desire to resolve this matter.”

According to Pohl, “Gov. Whitmer is already working with Sen. Curtis Hertel Jr. to pass a supplemental (bill) that includes Republican and Democratic priorities and would restore funding for the multicultural service agencies. If Republicans are serious about restoring this funding, they should work with the governor to pass this important supplemental.”

Holocaust Memorial Center Funding

According to the governor’s office, the Republican budget tried to gut funding for discrimination investigations by diverting \$1.5 million of the Department of Civil Rights budget to three private museums: the Arab American Museum in Dearborn, the Wright Museum in Detroit and the Holocaust Memorial Center.

Whitmer restored funding for discrimination investigations through the State Administrative Board. By doing so, she stripped the funding from each of the museums, resulting in a \$500,000 deficit for each, which may end their ability to collaborate on traveling exhibits designed to improve race relations as they did last year.

“It’ll be very difficult to continue the programs for the coming year without the funding,” HMC CEO Rabbi Eli Mayerfeld told *Bridge Magazine*. “The funding really was the catalyst that made these opportunities happen.”

According to Berman, “This is fake news. My understanding is [Republicans] actually increased the department’s budget by 1.2 percent. We didn’t try to gut discrimination investigations at all.”

Democrats counter that Republicans defunded portions of the Department of Civil Rights budget in response to the creation of a new Hate Crimes Unit put in place earlier this year by Attorney General Dana Nessel, which Republicans said could open the door to harassment of those with conservative beliefs.

Senate Appropriations Chairman Jim Stamas, R-Midland, told *Bridge Magazine* the \$1.5 million budget shift wasn’t an attempt to punish the department but rather to provide “sustainable” support for the institutions.

Moss says the state needs both: a “robustly funded budget to investigate hate crimes” and a well-funded Holocaust Memorial Center “that educates what can happen when hate is left unchecked.”

According to FBI statistics, hate crimes were up 14 percent in Michigan in 2017, with 456 incidents. The Michigan Department of Civil Rights fields about 2,000 civil rights complaints a year.

“As the only Jewish state senator, I feel a great amount of stress,” said Moss, who recently passed a state resolution naming Oct. 27, the anniversary of the Tree of Life shooting, a day rededicated to combating anti-Semitism. “I’ve been assured by the governor that when Republicans come back to the negotiation table, this will be addressed.”

Whitmer left a \$100 placeholder for each of the museums in the budget, giving lawmakers an opportunity to restore funding during negotiations. According to Berman, who is also Jewish, Republicans are open to doing so.

Moss urges constituents to reach out to their legislators and urge them to pass supplemental spending bills. “The louder our voices are the more pressure there is to act,” he said.