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Social service groups disappointed with lack of funding in state budget
By DAN GOLDBERG 01/18/2018 06:35 PM EST
Gov. Andrew Cuomo was prepared for the criticism. During his budget address on Tuesday, he said — not for the first time — that everyone always wants more money.

"Everyone is going to say to [the legislators] what they say to me: 'I want more,'" Cuomo said. "That is the constant refrain. 'I want more for education. I want more for health care. I want more for infrastructure. I want more for mental health.' And everybody's right. But everybody's wrong. It's a question of balancing resources."

Cuomo has gotten the balance wrong, according to Strong Nonprofits for a Better New York, a coalition of more than 350 nonprofit human services providers.

Social service organizations, many of which are operating in the red, were hoping for new money from the state to help them comply with increased costs due to the minimum wage increase. That does not appear in the budget.
"Your executive budget has once again failed to include critical investments in the human services nonprofit sector, despite the sector's financial instability stemming from woefully underfunded government contracts," the coalition group said in a letter sent to the governor this week. "While we acknowledge and appreciate that some key allocations have been made by your administration over the past several years, they are insufficient and amount to half measures that will not bring stability to nonprofits across New York."

The coalition had been looking for $100 million for the Nonprofit Infrastructure Capital Investment Program, $23 million to fund the minimum wage on direct contracts, and $65 million to provide wage adjustments for workers who were left out of last year's budget.

"While we have seen you take the lead on creating a progressive agenda of both policy and programs for New York, you have not acknowledged that much of your agenda needs to be carried out by nonprofits under state contract," the letter said. "If the sector is not strengthened through additional investment, they will not be able to continue providing services to communities. The final budget must include actions to address the needs of the State's nonprofit partners or they will not be in a position to carry out your progressive vision."

Amida Care, a Medicaid health plan for people with special needs or chronic conditions, was hoping the state would spend $9 million to expand rental subsidies to low-income individuals living with HIV.

"While the financial challenges the state is facing are real, investing in the end of HIV/AIDS is both the right and smart thing to do to save lives and dollars. If we don't address the crisis in the communities at greatest risk of infection, the outlook is grim, and we'll pay a very high price in the long run. Preventing each new HIV infection saves an estimated $500,000 in lifetime medical costs, which are largely borne by Medicaid and Ryan White funding nationwide," said Doug Wirth, president and CEO of Amida Care.

Abbey Fashouer, a spokeswoman for the governor, said Cuomo's office is reviewing the coalition's request, "will work with our community partners" to mitigate the minimum wage hike, and denied the state was cutting HIV funding.
“There were no spending reductions to programs that provide services and supports for people living with HIV/AIDS and other prevention initiatives," she said in an email. "The Governor remains fully committed to ending the epidemic by 2020, and this year proposed an expansion of the HASA program to upstate counties which will increase access to affordable housing for New Yorkers living with HIV/AIDS."

UPDATE: This story has been updated to reflect comment from the governor's office.