

The Somerville News

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Will money for seniors be saved?

By Mia Lamar

The Massachusetts State Senate has approved the additional funds needed to maintain the personal needs allowance of elderly nursing home residents at its current level of \$72.80 a month, correcting an initial whack from the House of Representatives which left the PNA at \$65. The Senate's proposal, along with the rest of next year's budget, was sent to conference committees late last month where it will await deliberations for a July 1 deadline.

For those residents affected by a potential cut to the allowance - money used to supply basic items such as toothpaste, socks and soap, as well as pay medical co-payments - the next month is simply a waiting game.

Elena Lowry, President of the Resident Council at the Somerville Home on Summer Street, has represented the home's 58 residents for the past two years.

"\$72.80 was very difficult," said Lowry. "\$65 would be impossible."

Initial cuts to the allowance come on the heels of 18 years of political haggling to set it at its current level. Previously, the allowance was \$60 a month, a level set in 1990 that remained unmoved until last year's budget negotiations.

According to State Rep. Carl Sciortino, D-Medford, first drafts of House budget proposals cut the allowance back down to \$60, however, members negotiated an additional \$2 million to raise it to \$65. The proposal was then sent to the Senate, with the recommendations of some members to allow the additional \$3 million needed to keep the allowance at \$72.80.

Members of the state delegation were at a loss to explain why the personal needs allowance was initially chosen for cuts in the House, though all pointed to the bleak economic environment. State Rep. Denise Provost, D-Somerville, who is also a member of the Joint Committee on Elder Affairs, remarked that the PNA was not the only item proposed for cuts in next year's budget.

"Many things were trimmed down," said Provost. "It's just an effort in a year in which the economy is not its most robust." She added, however, that she would continue advocating before budget conference committees to maintain the current personal needs allowance.

State Sen. Patricia Jehlen, D-Somerville, Chair of the Joint Committee on Elder Affairs, said she "couldn't imagine" why the House chose the allowance for cuts.

"It's a terrible thing to do," said Jehlen. "It's a tiny, tiny bit of dignity that would be taken from them."



If the Senate proposal does not survive conference committees this month, what would the eight dollar difference mean? A whole lot, according to Elena Lowry, who said medical co-payments already "take up almost all our money."

"We have the same needs that they do," said a frustrated Lowry.

She added that no preparations have been made for a potential loss of funding.

"We will just have to subsist," she said.

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Posted by: Ron Newman | [June 11, 2008 at 12:57 PM](#)

You make some good points Scott Mac -- and your eloquence in describing "a good piece of pootang" is something you should be proud of. But nobody mentioned Ronnie except for you.

Posted by: Craven did it for broads | [June 11, 2008 at 01:27 PM](#)