

LICC faces stringent cuts

by Douglas Finlay

The Long Island Crisis Center, claiming to be the oldest and only 24-hour seven-day-a-week crisis intervention center in the county, is being threatened with cuts to its budget that could effectively shut it down, if not greatly curtail its services to Bellmore and the surrounding communities come April 1.

“The county is going to cut 40-to-100% of the core budget of \$257,000 provided each year” to run the crisis center, remarked Linda Leonard, executive director of LICC.

She called that \$257,000 an “incredible bang-for-the-buck” in value because the program is run by volunteers who are trained 250 hours over nine months.

“These volunteers are the best trained in the country in crisis intervention” techniques, she continued. And now, she said, the LICC could be in danger of going out of business if drastic cuts are implemented.

If the cuts amount to only 40%, she said among the first areas to be cut will be the 24-hour hotline intervention service.

While the hotline may get 3-6 calls during the overnight hours, she called those calls “content” calls for such things as suicide intervention and picking up homeless kids off the streets throughout a prescribed area of the county.

“It takes years to build up a hotline such as this one,” which those with issues can call for guidance and some measure of resolution, she said.

The Pride For Youth program for gay, lesbian and transgender youth is a state-funded program that has already had its budget cut by 7%, she said, but is not in imminent danger of closing.

But the gang intervention program, or street outreach program, with its \$60,000 budget, is in jeopardy. The street outreach program, she said, goes all around the county and picks up homeless youth who have called into the hotline.

Cuts to or elimination of the street outreach program would also alter monitoring of Bedford Avenue to help contain gathering youth on Friday and Saturday nights from committing vandalism, which occurred last year on a small scale, she added.

However, Ms. Leonard was hopeful that County Executive Tom Suozzi’s request to the state for funds for cameras to catch drivers speeding through red lights, increases in the cigarette sales taxes and increases in fines for several violations would be considered by the state.

“If the state okays these items he said he wouldn’t have to cut youth-centered programs,” she said.

County Legislator Dave Denenberg (19th LD) said that any cuts to the LICC will happen only if the county does not get the requests from the state, and that Mr. Suozzi will be able to act to cut them on his own.

“The LICC contract was negotiated for 2009 by the Legislature at its same contract cost level as last

year,” he said, saying the county executive could cut at will without legislative approval if the state did not agree to the funds.

“In the contracts it states that alteration can be made after April 1,” Mr. Denenberg said.

However, in Mr. Suozzi’s introductory remarks to the 2009 budget he said “We have been informed by the Governor’s office that he will be introducing legislation that will impose a mandatory \$50 surcharge on certain traffic offense and infraction convictions adjudicated in Nassau County Police Districts as well as an authorization for Nassau County to adopt a local Red Light Camera Program. These initiatives will result in \$20 million in new revenues to the County to help defray the cost of” or cuts to several programs, including youth service programs such as LICC.

At present, the Youth Board is facing a \$4.7 million cut in its budget.

Still another program that would be affected by cuts is the LICC’s Drug and Alcohol hotline, and its \$35,000 budget. The 2009 budget calls for a cut of \$1.2 million in drug, alcohol and mental health funding.

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When asked whether the LICC can continue to operate after April 1 Legislator Norma Gonsalves (13th LD) said that it all depended on the county executive.

“He is waiting for Albany to respond.” She said if Albany does not respond positively, Mr. Suozzi could also consider a 2-1/2% energy tax on home heating oil, wood and other materials used for heating or cooling.

She added that Mr. Suozzi has been silent on how much negative impact programs would absorb should Albany not agree to his requests, and he does not invoke an energy tax.

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Senator Charles Fuschillo Jr. explained that he sponsored a bill for a red light camera program to get the county money, but that the county executive will have to make some tough decisions on what to cut on his own because he is not likely to get a cigarette tax or increases in fines.

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