

## NEW HAVEN/STATE

# Cuts mean fewer beds for homeless

## City may begin requiring proof of residency for spots at overflow shelters

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**NEW HAVEN** — The \$340,500 in cuts to homeless services will spell an end to the city's no-freeze policy and bring a new residency requirement at city-supported shelters.

More than \$200,000 of the \$250,000 needed to run the two overflow shelters has been cut.

"There is the possibility somebody will literally freeze to death in the winter," said Community Services Administrator Kica Matos.

The overflow shelter on Cedar Street was beyond capacity this winter, and the city opened an annex shelter on Ella T. Grasso Boulevard to accommodate record numbers of men seeking beds. By late May, when the two

overflow shelters closed for the spring and summer, both buildings were at capacity, housing an average of 75 men each night.

But despite the deep cuts appearing to spell budgetary doom to those shelters, the city plans to renew its five-year lease on the overflow shelter, Matos said.

"The city is committed to looking for resources elsewhere," Matos said. A meeting is planned with state legislators next week.

While city shelters have traditionally run on a first-come, first-served basis, the city may now establish a residency requirement at city-financed shelters, including the Emergency Shelter Management shelter (formerly known as the Immanuel Baptist Shelter) and the overflow.

According to Gary Spinner, co-chairman of the New Haven Homeless Advisory Commission,

one-third of shelter residents come from outside the city.

"Trying to document the residency requirements we would establish would be quite challenging, but that's certainly a policy option we would consider implementing," Matos said.

While former inmates and sex offenders have residency documentation from prison, for the chronically homeless it may be harder to find proof of residency, she said. "Obviously, there is the question of when does residency kick in," Matos said.

"A significant percentage of shelter residents are not from New Haven proper. I believe the region is in denial about the problems for the homeless. For a long time there has been undue reliance on the city of New Haven to provide services for the homeless," Matos said.

Columbus House is a private, nonprofit agency. Although it receives some city money, the city cannot dictate shelter policy. While the Columbus House manages the overflows, those shelters are city-supported and the city can set policy for them.

Columbus House Executive Director Alison Cunningham said it would be unlikely that the agencies could raise enough money privately to cover the city grants.

"I can't raise that amount of money in this short a time," she said. "It's a tragic moment we're facing and it will be tragic in December."

Emergency Shelter Management, New Haven Home Recovery and Life Haven also will see a 9 percent across-the-board reduction in their budgets. Funds for a transitional program for the

homeless administered by the Hill Health Center and the South Central Behavioral Network have been reduced by \$40,000.

Mayor John DeStefano Jr. had initially proposed \$500,000 in cuts to homeless services, but aldermen restored \$159,999 during budget negotiations, transferring money from firefighter overtime.

While the cut was criticized as "imaginary money" by Chief Administrative Officer Rob Smuts, Matos said the move made her job "less painful."

"We may have had to reduce Immanuel Baptist Shelter to an absolute skeleton. Provision of services to single men who are homeless would have been minimal at best," she said.

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