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Mayor OKs more AIDS housing funds

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Mayor Richard Daley Nov. 5 proposed increasing rental assistance for persons with HIV/AIDS by \$250,000 in 2008.

The increase comes after the City has already proposed setting aside 100 units funded by the funded by the Low Income Housing Trust Fund, costing about \$572,000, according to figures from the AIDS Foundation of Chicago.

The proposed rental assistance funding increase, a new line item in the budget, was included in amendments approved Nov. 5 by the City Council Committee on the Budget and Government Operations. The final vote was scheduled for Nov. 13.

“We’re really pleased that the city has responded,” said John Peller, director of government relations for AFC. “Nobody living with HIV is going to lose housing assistance this year.”

Peller said that about 100 people were in danger of losing their assistance. AFC had previously said about 200 people were affected.

“It turned out we didn’t account for people who leave the program through natural attrition, like people who might leave the area, or whose housing situations changed,” Peller said, adding that that number is usually about 100 people.

Ald. Tom Tunney (44th), who lobbied for the increase, said the new proposal represented a commitment from the City to assisting people in need.

“I think the mayor understands that the City needs to be responsive on all aspects of HIV, and homelessness is unfortunately a big part of that,” Tunney said.

Tunney meets quarterly with AFC and lobbies other aldermen on issues pertinent to HIV/AIDS.

“My colleagues get it,” he said, adding, “We’re building whatever it takes to get more people educated. The mayor gets it, too.”

Tunney said he would begin working on an increase in the number of Trust Fund units.

“The housing component might not be as huge a problem in next year’s budget, but this is something we’ll still be dealing with,” he said.

Peller added that while people currently placed have some breathing room for now, the unmet need this year still is still tremendous.

“In 2005, we were able to assist 1000 people. Next year it will be 500 to 600 people. We want to build the program up to where it was in 2005 again,” he said.

Furthermore, the problem could get worse as treatments for HIV/AIDS improve.

“In this great day of meds that keep people alive longer, those people still are going to need help affording a place to live. In a lot of ways, it’s a great problem to have, but it still needs solving,” said Peller.