



Victims of the budget crisis: Sen. Haine tours Impact CIL

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
June 22 2016 11:52 AM

ALTON - Sickening, catastrophic and a disgrace were all terms used to describe the current conditions caused by the Illinois budget crisis Wednesday morning at **Impact CIL**.

Sen. Bill Haine (D-Alton) toured the facility Wednesday morning with **Impact CIL Executive Director Cathy Contarino**. Due to the current budget crisis, Impact CIL has been forced to let go three employees and not operate on Fridays. Other employees have lost an extra day during the week as well, causing them to work only three days a week and lose as much as 40 percent of their income, as well as benefits. These cuts have caused services for the disabled in the community to be cut as well. Many of those services keep people out of nursing homes, which saves the state more money overall.

Haine described the organization as "venerable," stating he was an advocate during its foundation 31 years ago.

"I came today to see how they were doing," Haine said. "I think it's terrible what's happening here to these people. This organization brings people into the economic mainstream."



The goal of Impact CIL is to bring people with disabilities the ability to live independently. Through services such as Braille teaching, phones augmented for the hearing impaired and job placement, the organization helps keep people with disabilities from being institutionalized in nursing home care, often on the state's dime.

Rhonda Bargiel, who is an advocate for the blind at Impact CIL, said the organization's personal care assistance program has saved the State of Illinois as much as \$10 million. She said the leaders of Illinois were not helping her organization, which ultimately harms the people of Illinois.

"Everyone going up to Springfield is like the head of a large family," she said. "It feels to me more and more like they're not thinking about their families and people when they go to represent us."

Haine said her description was very apt, and spoke highly of the need to compromise in Springfield.

"It takes people willing to sit down and compromise," he said. "You have to do it. There are major philosophy differences, but we should be working for the common good

instead of thinking about who wins and loses. We have to do it for the common good of the community."

Contarino said the **State of Illinois** owes Impact CIL as much as \$300,000. That money loss has trickled down to the services provided by the organization. Many services at Impact CIL now have waiting lists, which is a first in its 31 years of existence. Contarino said people who have been working there for almost three decades are losing their jobs and benefits. One person is in danger of losing her home.

Shelly Richardson, who has been cut to four days a week, is selling items from her home to finance a mortgage after losing her partner.

"If I still had my 20 percent pay, I could refinance my mortgage," she said. "I'm literally selling things I own to keep myself from foreclosure."



Richardson has worked at Impact CIL for more than 10 years. Her loss also translates to the loss of services for the community. Losing an entire day from her pay schedule also loses people in need an entire day for their services. This has caused a tremendous backlog for everyone, Contarino said.

Without the state funding, Contarino said the organization is working almost entirely through federal funding.

"If that ever falls through, we're in trouble," she said.

The organization has taken a line of credit through the Bank of Edwardsville as a contingency plan, but hopes to never use it, due to a fear of not being able to pay it back if funding does not return.

Dane Rockafellow and **Amy Foster** were at the tour Wednesday morning as well. Rockafellow is currently sitting on the Impact CIL board. He utilized the organization's services in 1992 when he first arrived in Alton. He got his first job at Specialized, which has since been renamed Challenge Unlimited.

Foster said the current budget impasse is hurting the community's ability to access mental health services. She believes the community should realize what is happening to Impact CIL and other community-based human services organizations across the state.

"We need to get people rallying with us," she said. "Not everyone has a Senator Haine. People need to talk to the elected officials they have and get this rolling."