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### **Protective services asking for levy**

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LANCASTER - Rosemary Hajost said she believes an extra \$2.56 per month is a small price to pay to ensure the health, well-being and safety of children and older adults living in Fairfield County.

She says residents have a responsibility "to take care of (those) who can't take care of themselves" and an opportunity to come to the defense of those children and seniors who have been or are in danger of being exploited or mistreated on March 4.

"We cannot afford to turn away from children and elderly (people) who need our help," said Hajost, a Lancaster resident who supports Issue 12.

Issue 12 is a 10-year, 1-mill operating levy that would generate \$2.4 million annually for adult and protective services. If it passes the total annual cost to the owner of a \$100,000 home would be \$30.72.

"If people (saw) a child being scalded in hot water, they would do anything that they could to save that child," Hajost said. "How (would) we live with ourselves if we know that children (were) being harmed and let it go on?"

Local social service providers say as it stands now they only have the resources to investigate and intervene in the most severe cases of abuse, neglect and exploitation. They also said that without additional funding many more calls for help will go unanswered.

The Fairfield County Department of Job & Family received more than 5,000 calls about suspected child and elder abuse in 2007 - compared to 2,101 calls in 2000. However, caseworkers were only able to investigate about 40 percent of those claims because of inadequate funding, Executive Director Mike Orlando said.

And he predicts that number would fall to about 30 percent if the levy fails.

"It's not too dramatic to say that we are in a crisis," Orlando said. "The number of reports is skyrocketing, but local funding has been frozen since 1999. We aren't at a place where we can wait for help."

Rich Bowlen said residents must protect children at any cost.

Bowlen is the director of Child Protective Services.

"(Everyday) we see kids crying, hurt, injured and losing everything that they know, and we have to find a way to offer them hope. 'Can I afford to protect (those children)' should not be a consideration," Bowlen said.

Bowlen said CPS will be forced to eliminate support services like parenting education, supervised visitation and community education and outreach without additional revenue.

That prospect doesn't sit well with Mary Moore, who, along with her husband Jim, has taken in foster children for 35 years. Her fear is those children will be returned to the same unsafe environments from which they were removed because of financial restraints.

"It's a shame that everything boils down to money, (including) safety," she said. "The lack of money (means)

children will be sent home before it's safe for them to be sent home."

Patty Ciripompa, the director of Adult Protective Services, a state-mandated program, said APS will cease to exist if the levy does not pass. That is because the program is largely funded by a Social Services Block Grant from the federal government. However, that award - \$262,000 annually - expired at the end of 2007.

City Law Director Terre Vandervoort said APS has been instrumental in raising public awareness about elder abuse, advocating for those who have been victimized and gathering evidence against those who are suspected of mistreating and exploiting older adults.

"We have to reinforce that (elder abuse) is a crime against the senior and society. It is unacceptable to abuse seniors," she said. "Without APS, there (won't) be the resources to (thoroughly) investigate those allegations."