



Geraldine McKee, 89, says she has no family and that her case manager is her “key to life.” Photo by Michael Schwartz

Seniors fear losing lifeline

BY CORINNE LESTCH

A FRAIL population already suffering from various ailments may lose yet another “lifeline” — case managers and social workers.

Under proposed city cuts, the Department for the Aging would have to lay off about 100 case managers and social workers who provide services for seniors throughout the five boroughs, from coordinating Meals-on-Wheels to making sure they have heat in their apartments.

Beginning July 1, the agency has to slash its budget by about \$8 million. About 30% of the reductions would come from cutting contracts with some or all of 16 outside case management agencies.

“We’re going to be working with case management agencies to figure out the best way for them to implement the cuts, with the least impact on our fragile seniors,” said DFTA spokesman Chris Miller.

But if the cuts win City Council approval, about 8,000 homebound seniors will lose services, said Bobbie Sackman of the Council of Senior Centers and Services.

“The city is making cuts when we’re at a point of no return,” Sackman said. “If you eviscerate the case management system, how are these homebound people going to stay in the community? How are they not going to go into a nursing home?”

Each social worker now carries a caseload of about 71 seniors, with 800 seniors across the city — many below the poverty line — on waiting lists for a social worker.

In the Bronx, 17 social workers could be laid off and, as a result, 900 seniors affected.

“The potential cuts we’re hearing about right now could devastate the system,” said Evelyn Laureano, executive director of Neighborhood Shopp Case Management agency in the Bronx.

Laureano said Commissioner Lilliam Barrios-Paoli is looking to restructure and go from case managers to case aides, “which I see as an attack on the professionalization of the agency.”

Case aides help seniors with Medicaid paperwork, while case managers evaluate seniors and act as advocates for them, said Laureano.

Geraldine McKee, 89, heavily depends on her case manager.

“I have no family, so she is the only one I can even call. She is my key to life,” said McKee, who lives on the third floor of a Washington Heights walk-up. “She just told me I might lose her — how can they do this?”

Laureano said she and other case management agencies will meet this week with Commissioner Barrios-Paoli to argue against the cuts.