



Sen. Sue Serino. | AP Photo/Mike Groll

Chairs of Legislature's aging committees push for senior services budget funds

By **NICK NIEDZWIADK** | 02/07/17 01:12 PM EST

The chairwomen of the Senate and Assembly's aging committees joined advocates Tuesday to push to protect funding for senior services.

Sen. Sue Serino, a Republican from Dutchess County, said New York has one of the largest senior populations in the country, and a lack of support can force seniors out of their homes and out of the state entirely.

"We're on the brink of an unprecedented age wave here in New York," she said at a press conference.

Assemblywoman Donna Lupardo, a Binghamton Democrat who heads the Assembly's aging committee, said legislators need to defend and increase the amount of money the state dedicates to older residents.

"It's not just about aging in place," she said. "It's about aging in style that really suits the type of life we want to live."

Beth Finkel, the state director for AARP, said there are already thousands of seniors on waiting lists for existing state programs.

"If we want people to stay in their homes and their communities, we have to make the plans [for services] now to make sure they're in place," she said.

Bobbi Sackman, director of public policy at LiveON NY, a senior citizen advocacy group, said Gov. Andrew Cuomo's executive budget puts at least 65 senior centers in New York City at risk "just by shifting language" in how the federally funded Social Services Block Grant program can be used.

The proposed change states that the funds are to be used only for child care services, which could put an estimated \$17 million for the state Department of the Aging at risk.

"That's the budget dance," Sackman said. "It's a very mean dance because all you can ever do is dance in the quicksand year after year. You don't make progress."

A spokesman for the state budget division did not immediately comment, but earlier this week stated that directing the money, called Title XX funds, to child care will not cause any reduction in other services in New York City.

"We are directing Title XX funds to child care while increasing total funding to New York City by \$400 million," Morris Peters said.

Lupardo said that legislators are pushing the governor's office to alter his plan in his "30-day Budget Amendments," which are due next week.

"We have to make some restorations," she said.