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## Passaic County women's shelter struggles to cope with financial hit

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The Strengthen Our Sisters (SOS) shelters in Wanaque and West Milford are "struggling very much" to cope with the loss of almost \$500,000 a year in state funds and to continue to serve women in need.

To meet the terms of its contract with the state Department of Children and Families (DCF), Strengthen Our Sisters had to provide 24/7 emergency shelter services, DCF public information officer Lauren Kidd said Thursday.

"While we commend SOS for its commitment to serve homeless women and victims of domestic violence, we contracted for 24/7 emergency shelter entry and it did not meet the requirements," Kidd said.

She said the state's concern is that victims of domestic violence who call SOS in an emergency situation may find the shelters are already at capacity because they are serving "women whose issue is homelessness."

SOS founder Sandra Ramos said that the loss of roughly \$470,000 will have a big impact on



the shelter and she hopes to change the state's mind.

In the meantime, she said, the shelter is "struggling very much" to cover its costs.

Ramos said that the problem boils down to the time it takes for victims of domestic violence to get back on their feet after their ordeals. The state would only pay for 60 days of emergency housing, and Ramos said most victims don't complete the path to independence so quickly, even with the career training and other programs SOS offers.

"How can they get their life in order in 60 days?" Ramos asked.

While the state is not calling for victims to be evicted after 60 days, Kidd said a longer stay would have to be paid for from the SOS budget.

Kidd said that it was the responsibility of SOS to help domestic violence victims transition into an independent lifestyle. She also said that the state tried to work with SOS over the years so that it could fully conform to the 24/7 requirement.

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