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'Meals on Wheels' supporters march to keep program alive

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Abby Waller

By Leland Kim - [bio](#) | [email](#)

HAWAII STATE CAPITOL (KHNL) - Budget cuts and possible layoffs face Hawaii state workers Thursday. A group of state economists called the Council of Revenues lowered its projections for the current fiscal year.

This means lawmakers and Gov. Linda Lingle (R-Hawaii) have to scramble to close an even bigger budget gap than they were working on before. We're talking about major cuts in spending, and even job cuts.

This could mean the end of three state programs: the Disability and Communications Board in the Department of Health, the Planning and Development Agency also in the Department of Health, and the Career Kokua Program in the Department of Labor and Industrial Relations. This translates to 374 jobs being cut.

And Thursday morning, a group marched to the Capitol not to save jobs, but to save a program that's important to so many seniors on the island.

These students try to attract some attention, not for a school fundraiser, but to raise awareness for Lanakila's Meals on Wheels Program.

"We're here to support our seniors who don't have to worry about their next meal," said Abby Waller, a 13-year-old eighth grade student at Holy Family Catholic Academy. "And have to choose between medicine and getting their food which is a very hard decision to make."

"It's kind of hard to see all of these people struggling because I mean, they've done a lot for us," said Travis Briones, Holy Family's student body president. "And they've made a difference in our lives."

These seniors are only a fraction of the people Lanakila helps out. It serves more than 19,000 meals every month, and if funding gets cut, 2,600 seniors could go hungry.

That's why they're here. That's why they're marching.

They march from Honolulu Hale all the way to the Capitol to convince lawmakers to keep Lanakila going.

"If this program stops, what does it mean for you?" asked KHNL.

"If it stops we won't have Meals on Wheels," said Bernice



Travis Briones



Lois Bunin



Balderama, a 79-year-old senior citizen who depends on Lanakila's service. "And the people won't get the health foods they are getting every day. That's what it means to me."

But for Lois Bunin, it's a lot more serious.

"Oh, I wouldn't be able to eat a hot meal every day," said the 84-year-old. "It's as simple as that."

More than three-quarters of folks Lanakila helps out are disabled.

"Being in this wheelchair, sometimes making a hot meal is an effort," said Bunin. "You know you should eat well, but it's still an effort."

So for many, they depend on Lanakila because this could be the only hot meal they have all day. And demand is going up, the waitlist is growing, and funding only covers about two-thirds of the entire cost.

"We should do this because Lanakila is helping out the generation before us," said Briones. "And the generation before us, there was a lot of struggling and if we help them, they can feel like their lives were worth it, like it was worth to be here."

And is it worth it? Their faces say it all.

A senate bill (SB 1679) that would take reserve funds to continue programs like Meals on Wheels passed first reading Thursday. It has been referred to various committees.

To find out more about Lanakila's Meals on Wheels program, go [here](#) or click the link on this page.



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