

Nursing homes warn of staff cuts

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Arizona nursing-home representatives warn that some of the state's long-term-care facilities could close or reduce staff if federal lawmakers adopt President Bush's proposed 2009 budget.

The budget would slash \$13.6 million in Medicare funds in Arizona, which equals \$18.58 less per patient per day, according to the Coalition to Protect Senior Care, a group of health-care assistants, nurses and other nursing-home staffers.

"The impact of these cuts would be significant," said Kathleen Collins Pagels, executive director of Arizona Health Care Association, which represents the state's nursing homes. "Without that funding, many homes will not be able to provide the quality of care they need to."

Bush's budget calls for scaling back annual growth in Medicare spending to 5 percent from 7.2 percent, largely by reducing reimbursement to health-care providers. Congressional Democrats already criticized the cuts.

Nursing-home representatives have aggressively sought to protect the funding. The seniors' coalition has held news conferences in several states and a rally in Washington, D.C., warning of the impact of such cuts.