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Debate over cultural funding

By: Jennifer Bernstein

Various cultural organizations in Erie County are not happy with the County Executive. They say he's withholding additional funds the Legislature allocated to them for 2010. YNN's Jennifer Bernstein tells us why the struggle over funds is causing debate in the legislature.

BUFFALO, N.Y. -- A tense debate over funding for cultural organizations took center stage at the Erie County Legislature Monday.

"We are talking about a small pot of money, that should the account the legislature identified to pay for it materialize, the County Executive will be more than happy to follow the legislature's recommendations," said Chris Collins' Chief of Staff Chris Grant.



"But if you're declaring you want to honor and uphold what the legislature's done, there's no discussion with the legislature?" said Legislator Lynn Marinelli.

There's a discrepancy over six percent of funding allocated to Cultural for their 2010 budget.

The County Executive originally gave a little more than \$5 million dollars to the organizations. The Legislature awarded additional funding to Cultural. Chris Collins' administration say that increase was supposed to come out of revenues from a 'vacancy turnover account', or budgeted money left over. It said that money can't be counted on until the year's books are closed.

"If those dollars materialize in the vacancy turnover account, the Cultural will get their increased allotment in March of 2011. We won't know that until March of 2011. But if indeed that happens, they will get that extra funding," said Collins' spokesman Grant Loomis.

The Administration claimed some 500 County jobs could be at risk, if the additional funding is given but doesn't exist. Legislators, as well as the Comptroller argued the money should be released.

"If we were in a situation where we seriously were broke, we didn't have the money, I can understand why the County Executive is saying what he's saying. But we ended up with a \$40 million dollar surplus, it's not like we don't have the money," said County Comptroller Mark Poloncarz.

"The money was allocated. The money was put in the budget for this. He okayed it, and so the money should be paid out," said Legislator Dan Kozub.

For now, legislators are looking to the County's \$44 million dollar surplus as a possible solution. But the County Executive's office doesn't agree. They think the surplus should be used to secure Erie County's financial future.

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