

Speakers: Poverty should outrage everyone in the local community

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BEDFORD -- It is hard to have a fair shot in life when you are living in poverty, according to Deborah Chausse, executive director of House of Hope in Lowell.

Chausse was one of three community leaders who spoke during a forum on homelessness and hunger yesterday at Middlesex Community College.

According to speakers, the cycle of poverty creates a lack of education, greater illness, and feelings of hopelessness and alienation within the community.

Chausse said poverty is "ethically and morally wrong, but it is financial suicide to provide emergency services. It is between three and four times more costly to keep a family in a shelter than permanent housing."

Chausse explained that emergency shelters like House of Hope did not exist 22 years ago. House of Hope began as a "temporary emergency response to a temporary emergency situation." But the problem of poverty is a consistent reality today, she said.

Elisha Harig-Blaine, coordinator for Shift Coalition, which works locally to prevent homelessness, urged people to call the governor's office and work to restore the \$425 million that was cut from the state budget last Friday.

Harig-Blaine said he believes the "state is spending \$75 million just on shelters."

State Rep. Jay Kaufman, D-Lexington, said he heard an "unmistakable tone of outrage" in the voices of Harig-Blaine and Chausse. There should be outrage in the community too, he said.

"If we leave here with a sense that we need to do something about this, and not just us, but, what can you do about this?" Kaufman said.

For a complete list of local food banks and assistance programs, go to www.lowellsun.com.