



## Federal government shutdown could be 'chaos' for Jackson County if it continues

By Lisa Satayut | [Lsatayut@mlive.com](mailto:Lsatayut@mlive.com) on October 01, 2013

JACKSON, MI –While the first day of the government shutdown doesn't seem to have an immediate effect on a majority of local programs, a continued shutdown could prove to be "chaos" for Jackson County. Officials say the biggest impact could be seen in federal food benefits Jackson County residents receive from the Department of Human Services. A continued shutdown would also impact nonprofit agencies that provide help with food, shelter and other human needs to residents. A majority of these agencies receive federal funds.

The 28,760 Jackson County residents receiving food assistance benefits from the DHS are safe for the month of October. Those that are receiving cash assistance also are safe, at least for now. But, if the shutdown continues into November there could be some problems, DHS Spokesman Dave Akerly said. The Bridge Cards (food assistance) are loaded monthly, and recipients could find themselves with an empty card in November. The same goes for those receiving cash assistance. Akerly said it would be "unchartered territory" for the government to continue the shut down into next month.

While the effect of a continued shutdown is not clearly visible right now, the executive director of the **United Way of Jackson County** is extremely worried about the toll it could have on area nonprofits, especially food pantries. "If people call and say they have nothing to eat, we (area nonprofits) wouldn't have the resources to respond right now," United Way Executive Director Ken Toll said. If federal food assistance is cut in November, those that rely on it would have to depend on area food pantries. Toll said those resources would deplete quickly causing "chaos."

"When funds get interrupted it causes all kinds of chaos when you have a low operating margin like nonprofits do," he said. "It keeps us up at night; it's too big for a community to respond to and we wouldn't be able to adapt." Other agencies also are able to remain operational, but a longterm shutdown could create problems. The Jackson Housing Commission, which is funded by the U.S Department of Housing and Urban Development, is fully funded through the end of October. But after that, officials would have to find alternate funding sources. "They'd have to make some difficult decisions if that happens," HUD spokesman Jerome Brown said of a continued shutdown. "They'd have to use their reserve funds and only their reserve funds in that instance."

The **Community Action Agency's Head Start** won't be affected by the shutdown but the Head Start offices in Washington D.C. and Chicago are closed, said CAA Head Start Director Mary Cunningham DeLuca. In addition, constituents of U.S. Rep Tim Walberg might have trouble reaching a staffer. While the Jackson office is not closed, operations are limited. "Office operations have been limited by the Senate's unwillingness to discuss a compromise with the House. Rep Walberg's staff remains committed to providing excellent constituent and legislative services during a period of limited government services in which costs will be limited to only vital and necessary concerns" Spokeswoman Sarah Kuziomko said.

*Reporters Will Forgrave and Tarryl Jackson contributed to this report*

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