

Providers wonder if secession might abandon the needy

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Some local social service providers see secession as an opportunity to improve their agency's work, but others worry that important programs might be ignored if the Island sets off on its own.

The secession issue raised numerous questions for the 12 representatives from local social service groups participating in a focus group interview at the Advance last night.

The panelists, whose groups often depend on city funding and serve diverse clients — from pregnant teens to the mentally ill — did not reach agreement about whether secession would jeopardize or enhance funding for local social services.

Despite the doubts of about half the room, all but one of the participants, who declined to express her view, said they favored a yes vote in the Nov. 6 referendum,

which, if it passes, would create a commission to propose a charter for a new city.

Most viewed the fall vote as a non-committal first-step to explore secession, support for which could be withdrawn when Islanders go to the polls four years later to vote on the proposed charter.

Of primary concern to several who participated in the group discussion, which was moderated by Advance Editor Les Trautmann, was that their clients not get lost in the shuffle to forge a new city.

"If you're setting up a new city, there's going to have to be a lot of emphasis on infrastructure, things which the general population thinks our city has let them down on like sewers on the South Shore and public transportation, and I think that social services would get short shrift," said Rona Solomon, director of the Center for HIV Education Services, a

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Social service providers listen to a discussion on secession at the Advance.

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