

Health aides seek parking break

Workers want Waterbury City Hall to help

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— Home health-care workers who serve the disabled and elderly in downtown towers are being particularly hurt by the city center's parking arrangements, advocates said. Either they have to leave their needy charges to hurry back to the street to feed the meters, or are forced to pay a monthly parking garage fee that takes up much of their meager part-time, minimum-wage earnings. That's why the Naugatuck Valley Project has appealed to the mayor's office to help find a way to alleviate the burden. "Out of five buildings (that health care workers visit), four do not have parking, and if they do, it's three or four spots available," said Elizabeth Rosa, community organizer for NVP, a coalition of churches, unions and citizen groups. "If you're at Josephine Towers and you're at the parking meter, you're going to be there two hours, and if you're delayed in going downstairs to put in more quarters, you get a ticket for \$50 or your car gets towed away." More than 200 home health-care workers visit patients in the downtown area between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m., Rosa said. Most of them make less than \$9 an hour on a part-time basis, she said. Parking garages can cost upwards of \$75 to \$85 per month, far too steep, she said, for what the workers are paid. Mayoral aide Monroe Webster said the city is willing to work with NVP on a solution, although initial ideas proved unworkable. "They initially asked we provide some type of parking passes for workers," but the estimated number of them was too high, he said. "Obviously, our response was, We can't give out that many passes; we just don't have an ability to do that." The next idea, he said, is to get the health aides, NVP, city officials and garage owners to discuss a plan to perhaps provide parking at a lower cost. That meeting has not yet been scheduled. Webster acknowledged that the city has an interest in helping the health-care workers, as their presence benefits downtown businesses. "With the number of workers down there, we want to do whatever we can to accommodate them and get those feet on the streets and sidewalks during their lunch times, so they can visit the businesses down there," he said.

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