'I would be dead': After pleas, council restores some money for addiction center

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A last-minute addition of $350,000 to the city of Cincinnati’s human services budget sparked a heated debate: Should the money fight the heroin epidemic or violence in city streets?

When the dust settled in a special session of City Council Wednesday, two motions were passed splitting the fund between several services in what Councilwoman Yvette Simpson described as a compromise.

Advocates from both sides came to speak out for the funding.

The Cincinnati Center for Addiction Treatment brought a dozen people in recovery to tell council members how the CCAT House, as it is called, saved their lives.

"I had 18 open warrants. I had drug, theft and prostitution charges. They hooked me up with long-term treatment as well as transitional living," said Lindsay Lung, 35, of Madeira. "Without CCAT House, I would be dead. I'm a single mom. I have a daughter who turns seven over the weekend and I'm her head football coach because of CCAT House."

The $180,000 in funding granted to the CCAT House last year was not renewed in the initial budget, CEO Sandi Kuehn said.

The motions passed Wednesday set aside $87,500 to the CCAT House, $87,500 to the Urban Minority Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Outreach Program.

Another $175,000 went to the Human Services Fund for violence prevention. That was on top of $260,000 that was already allocated to violence prevention in the budget.

When the fight began, Simpson and Mayor John Cranley took opposing views on the money. The two are facing off in this year's mayor's race.

Simpson wanted the money to go to anti-violence efforts. Doing so would have brought the city's anti-violence spending to $600,000.

Cranley said the money was flowing outside the traditional vetting process. He had argued money should go to fight "the explosion of the opioid crisis."

After the special session, Simpson said she was pleased with Wednesday's vote.

"Today, the city of Cincinnati agreed that we need a long-term strategy to battle both violence and substance abuse in our community," she said, but noted more could be done in both arenas. "It is unfortunate we have insufficient resources to funds these life-saving initiatives and the organizations that desperately need it."