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## SOCIAL SECURITY

### Flat payments will lead to tough choices

Friday, October 16, 2009

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Jersey City seniors and senior services workers were outraged yesterday after learning there will be no automatic cost-of-living increase for Social Security recipients next year.

"I don't think it's a reasonable decision," said Larry Eccleston, director of the Jersey City Senior Affairs Division. "Their costs will continue to rise. They don't pay less than anybody else."

Eccleston, who has worked with senior citizens for 25 years, said this decision will cause a decline in the quality of life for the elderly.

"They're going to have to make choices between food and medicine," said Eccleston.

For roughly 25 percent of seniors in New Jersey, Social Security checks are their only form of income, said Grace Egan, executive director of the New Jersey Foundation for Aging.

It is the first time since 1975 that there will not be an automatic increase.

Federal officials justified the freeze on the grounds of lower consumer prices and President Obama's proposal to send seniors another round of \$250 checks.

"Social Security is doing its job helping Americans maintain their standard of living," said Commissioner of Social Security Michael J. Astrue. "This year, in light of the human need, we need to support President Obama's call for us to make another \$250 recovery payment for 57 million Americans."

Social Security payments were increased 5.8 percent in January.

According to a study by the New Jersey Foundation for Aging, the average annual expenses of a Hudson County senior living in a one-bedroom apartment is \$26,526. That same Hudson County senior receives an average of \$12,418 in Social Security a year, Egan said.

"I think it's a lousy situation," Eddie Feathers, 61, said about the cost-of-living freeze.

Robert Gillespie, 84, feels powerless to change what happens.

"There's nothing I can do about it," he said. "I wish I could."