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Neighborhood Recovery Initiative: Another pol's spouse got money from Quinn violence program

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SPRINGFIELD - The wife of a state lawmaker from the south suburbs made more than $137,000 in salary and benefits from [Gov. Pat Quinn's](http://www.nexis.com/search/XMLCrossLinkSearch.do?bct=A&risb=21_T21308977520&returnToId=20_T21309488292&csi=11064&A=0.9514659829031207&sourceCSI=162599&indexTerm=%23PE000A4UW%23&searchTerm=Gov.%20Pat%20Quinn's%20&indexType=P) now-abolished Neighborhood Recovery Initiative, state records show.

That total for Jaclin Davis, wife of state Rep. Will Davis, D-Homewood, represented 11 percent of the anti-violence grant dollars her employer, Healthcare Consortium of Illinois, was allotted in 2011 and 2012 under Quinn's program.

Davis was the organization's program coordinator, which put her in charge of managing how the governor's 2010 program was implemented in Thornton Township. More than $1.2 million in state funds were disbursed through her agency.

The Neighborhood Recovery Initiative was launched by Quinn in October 2010, less than a month before he narrowly defeated Republican Bill Brady in that year's gubernatorial election.

Republicans have contended the program was a thinly disguised, taxpayer-funded, get-out-the-vote effort designed to boost Quinn's election hopes when some polling had him running behind Brady. The governor has rejected that GOP claim, citing a surge in teen shootings as the basis for the program.

In February, Auditor General William Holland slammed the program for being hastily implemented and beset with "pervasive" mismanagement. Quinn's administration signed contracts just weeks before the 2010 election and gave Chicago aldermen, rather than an agency under his direct control, authority to recommend which not-for-profits would serve as pass-throughs for the massive program.

Quinn stopped funding the Neighborhood Recovery Initiative in fall of 2012, and he abolished the state agency charged with implementing it, the Illinois Violence Prevention Authority, last year. Anti-violence spending was transferred to the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority.

Jaclin Davis, who did not respond to an email request for comment Wednesday, was not singled out in Holland's audit nor accused of any wrongdoing.

Her husband said she had worked for the Healthcare Consortium of Illinois for several years prior to the launch of Quinn's program and that she was chosen to help administer it in Thornton Township on the basis of her work as a case manager for the organization's senior care division, not through any intervention on his part.

"The CEO didn't call me and ask me if I wanted him to move my wife into that position. It's not a conversation he and I had," the five-term House member told the Chicago Sun-Times. "I can only assume it was based on whatever criteria he thought was appropriate in his own organization."

The state representative said his wife oversaw the programmatic parts of the Neighborhood Recovery Initiative program throughout Thornton Township while another Healthcare Consortium of Illinois staffer managed the fiscal side of the program locally.

Particularly since he played no role in his wife's appointment, the lawmaker said he saw no inherent conflict in him serving in the state Legislature and her being paid with state funds. In fact, he said, it's no different than the arrangement of some other legislators who have spouses, partners or other family members in government jobs.

"If her CEO, of course, knowing who she is and who I am, [thought] there was a potential conflict, I'm sure he wouldn't have made that employment decision," Davis said. "If there was, I wouldn't have wanted him to."

Salim Al Nurridin, the chief executive officer of the Dolton-based nonprofit that employs Jaclin Davis, declined comment Wednesday.

The Healthcare Consortium of Illinois parceled out the largest share of Neighborhood Recovery Initiative funding in 2011 and 2012 to Thornton Township, whose supervisor, Frank Zuccarelli, operates one of the south suburbs' most prolific political voter-turnout machines. State records show $466,545 went to the township during that period.

A top Republican in the Illinois Senate, who has been a leading critic of Quinn's Neighborhood Recovery Initiative, said Ms. Davis' involvement in the program is hard to justify.

"The more that people dig into this program and find out what was really done, the more the whole thing just stinks," said Sen. Matt Murphy, R-Palatine.

"I think people are very cynical about those in politics benefiting themselves," he continued. "And the perception is going to be that's what was done here again."

Quinn's office denied playing any role in Davis' appointment to oversee the anti-violence program in Thornton Township but noted she started working with Healthcare Consortium of Illinois in 2009, prior to the launch of the Neighborhood Recovery Initiative.

"To be clear, the governor's office never had any knowledge or role in the various grantees' personnel decisions," Quinn spokeswoman Brooke Anderson said.

Davis' nonprofit also has worked with the state for more than a decade and contracts with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Cook County Hospitals and other hospitals in the region.

"In 2012, we discovered management and oversight issues related to the NRI program and promptly resolved those issues by abolishing the agency responsible for the mismanagement and abolishing the program altogether," Anderson said.

Last week, the Illinois House voted overwhelmingly to have Holland perform another audit into anti-violence programs after the dissolution of the Neighborhood Recovery Initiative program. Davis was one of five House members to vote against that resolution.

The disclosure involving the legislator's wife is not the first time questions have been raised about the background or clout of an administrator chosen by one of the 23 social-service agencies spread across the city and suburbs to oversee how Quinn's anti-violence money got spent.

Last month, the Chicago Sun-Times reported how state records showed the husband of Cook County Circuit Clerk Dorothy Brown was paid more than $146,401 in salary and fringe benefits over a two-hear period from Neighborhood Recovery Initiative grant funds.

Benton Cook III, who denied being paid that much but couldn't recall the amount he got, received that money for serving as a program coordinator with the Chicago Area Project, which was in charge of doling out $2.1 million in state anti-violence funds to organizations in West Garfield Park.

One nonprofit that received $3,333 in Neighborhood Recovery Initiative funding from the Chicago Area Project funding, Dream Catchers Community Development Corp., had been formed by Cook and was based in the home he shares with his wife, the circuit clerk.

Cook no longer has any affiliation with the group, a Chicago Area Project spokesman said.