

Nonprofits fear new Capitol rental fees

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SALT LAKE CITY (AP) - Low-income advocates say they're worried that a policy change could force them to pay to rent meeting rooms at the Capitol at a time their budgets are already strained.

The Capitol Preservation Board has told nonprofit groups that they no longer will get free use of meeting rooms at the Capitol.

During the past legislative session, the fees were waived. But because of tightened state budgets, groups will have to pay fees that start at \$50 per hour, angering some.

"It's democracy. It's the people's house and we paid taxes to build it," said Melissa Smith of the Community Action Partnership of Utah.

Linda Hilton, director of the Coalition of Religious Communities, says the change could hurt her organizational efforts.

She says her group hold weekly meetings at the Capitol while the Legislature is in session to train volunteers, but that might not be possible in the future.

"I just think it's another way to cut low-income advocates out of the public process," she said.

Dave Hart, architect of the Capitol, said he is responding to the Legislature, which approved a new fee schedule for room rentals last session and directed the preservation board to get more of its budget from fees and less from taxpayers.

Hart says he prefers to find a way not to charge nonprofits. But that would require lawmakers to cover that expense when they meet next January. Until then, the groups would have to pay rent.

Information from: The Salt Lake Tribune, <http://www.sltrib.com>

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The Utah State Capitol building and rotunda. (David Jolley/Wikipedia)

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