

County to lay off 44 workers

By Erin Tracy | The Daily Democrat | January 27, 2010

A mid-year budget deficit of more than \$3.1 million has led to the termination of 44 county employees and a reduction of public services as approved by the Board of Supervisors Tuesday.

The Department of Alcohol Drug and Mental Health and the Department of Employment and Social Services will each lose 15 employees, while the Health Department will be losing 14 positions.

"We recognize the very human connection to those cuts, but not taking action would mean a deeper shortfall," County Administrative Officer Patrick Blacklock told the board.

The shortfall is primarily the product of a trending decline in the realignment funds -- sales tax and vehicle license fees -- and public safety sales tax.

Further, the state has failed to pay \$600,000 in state-allocated funds for mandated programs.

Assistant County Administrator Pat Leary said, "the state continues to stiff counties," by unconstitutionally holding those funds.

To further offset the deficit, ADMH Executive, Director Kim Suderman, suggested reducing operating hours at clinics in West Sacramento and Davis, relocating Woodland Wellness Centers, and canceling contracts with Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis and Treatment providers so that the service can be provided in-house.

The latter may do more harm than good in terms of revenue according to county officials and representatives from several of the contracted service providers.

Chief Probation Officer Marjorie Rist said in-custody juveniles have long received the contracted services of Communicare. The company's employees have received hundreds of thousands of dollars in specialty training to meet their needs, which has led to a reduction in detention and recidivism, according to Rist.

Rist said Communicare employees are better equipped to serve the juveniles, and while continuing the contracts will likely lend itself to more layoffs at ADMH, she is in favor of maintaining contracts.

The board voted unanimously to further examine this possibility, but accepted the remainder of Suderman's recommendations.

Cuts and reductions to DESS included a reduced workforce to the Child Welfare Services Division with reconfiguration throughout. But a 3-2 vote, with McGowan and Matt Rexroad dissenting, approved a motion to postpone eliminating the Transitional Housing program for Emancipated Youth.

With reductions approved to Public Health, Director Joe Iser said the department name has become somewhat of a misnomer since primarily the indigent population will be served, and not the general public.

The board approved cuts to department programs like tobacco cessation, syringe exchange, nurse home visitation, free vaccine clinics, and counseling for HIV/AIDS patients.

Supervisor Jim Provenza voted no on this item, citing opposition to the latter two services.

The board grappled over vital services but could collectively agree that all the low lying fruit has been picked. Provenza wanted to spend more time examining particular service cuts, while Mike McGowan argued that time is of the essence and each program carries its own significant weight in the community.

"We are arguing about where we should put the desk chairs on the Titanic," McGowan said.