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Dislocated worker fund starting to run dry

More layoffs could force county to seek emergency federal funding

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FAIRFIELD COUNTY - If two or three large businesses were to liquidate inside the county, the money to help get workers back to work might not be sufficient.

Fairfield County Job & Family Services has about \$80,000 remaining in its dislocated workers fund for the rest of the current fiscal cycle, which ends in June, said Mike Miller, director of workforce development for JFS.

The fund began the 2008 fiscal year, July 1, 2008, with \$238,000, said Nina Ried-Williamson, workforce development supervisor for Fairfield County Job & Family Services.

"At this point, our funding for (dislocated workers) is able to support current known layoffs," said Mike Orlando, director of Fairfield County Job & Family Services.

If the fund were to run out of money, the county would then apply for Rapid Response funding provided by the federal government, but allocated by the state.

The dislocated workers fund gives assistance to laid off workers by providing them with education, specialized training and job placement, Orlando said.

Pickaway and Ross counties already have depleted their dislocated worker funds and are applying for rapid response funding, Orlando said.

Fairfield, Pickaway and Ross counties make up one workforce development area. Meaning money can be loaned from one county to the other but one county cannot drain the account entirely, Orlando said.

The state has allotted about \$15 million in rapid response funds during the 2008 fiscal year, Wendy Patton, Rapid Response Administrator for the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services said in an e-mail.

At present, funds are fully obligated to various Workforce Investment Areas, Patton said.

"There's not as much available," Miller said. "It's possible we would not receive any money if (dislocate worker funds) runs out."

Increasing unemployment rates have increasingly strained the state's budget for those out of work.

In November, the Ohio Department of Job and Family services said at least a \$500 million federal loan would be needed to supplement the unemployment compensation fund which was projected to be empty by the end of December.

The dislocated workers fund focuses much of its resources on mass layoffs but workers laid off individually are also eligible, Orlando said.

"When a plant shuts down, we start meeting with every dislocated worker," he said.

Any worker who was terminated or laid off through no fault of their own is classified as a dislocated worker, Ried-Williamson said.

However, anyone in need of assistance finding employment can get help from Worknet, a public assistance program, she said.

In Fairfield County, there is a Worknet center at the Fairfield County Job & Family Services in Lancaster.

Orlando said the economy has stretched JFS thin, but they are still able to assist those in need.

"We are stretched but as long as there is no catastrophe, as long as there are not multiple big layoffs in the same year, we have adequate staff to accommodate (the community)," Orlando said.

Additional Facts

By the Numbers

- **\$238,000:** Beginning balance in the 2008 fiscal year (July 1, 2008)
- **\$80,000:** Amount remaining in the dislocated workers fund for Fairfield County Job & Family Services
- **\$6,000:** Maximum one person can receive per year for training from JFS
- **50 or more:** Number of people laid off from one company that leads JFS to counsel workers

- **7.3 percent:** Ohio's unemployment rate

Source: *Fairfield County Job*

& Family Services
