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## Fairfield County J&FS implements cost-saving measures

### Cut and frozen wages, furloughs to compensate for decreasing state funds

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*The Eagle-Gazette Staff*

FAIRFIELD COUNTY - Employees of Fairfield County Job & Family Services will forgo wage increases until the agency's financial situation improves.

About 65 employees opted to make additional financial sacrifices to help shore up state cuts in funding for the agency.

Fairfield County J&FS Director Mike Orlando said the cuts were need to shore up about \$150,000 worth of cuts made by Governor Ted Strickland midway through fiscal year 2009 - around December 2008.

"It's important that every dollar be directed to those who have the greatest need," Orlando said. "That's why we decided to forgo wage increases."

Orlando said the wage freezes and voluntary cost saving measures will save the agency about \$240,000 annually, which might be only a fraction of funds needed to shore up decreasing revenues from the state.

Orlando said the governor's proposed budget for fiscal year 2010 and 2011 - to be approved by July 1, 2009 - cuts \$1.8 million in funding from the county agency during the next two years.

"There isn't any question at all that if the budget passes, as is, we will not have sufficient funds to maintain current staffing levels," he said.

Orlando said the number of employees affected still is being analyzed but he estimates 10 agency workers could be laid off.

The 65 employees who opted to take part in the voluntary cost-saving program had the choice of reducing their weekly hours from 40 to 35 or taking as much as to 13 weeks of unpaid leave.

The cost-saving measures will be analyzed quarterly and raises could be reinstated if the financial situation improves. Orlando said the wage freezes will remain in place for the second quarter of 2009 and likely continue throughout the entire year.

"It's uncharted territory. We don't know how deep the recession will go," Orlando said. "It could get worse before it gets better. It makes it nearly impossible to predict beyond a quarter-by-quarter basis."

Orlando, who waived his raise from the Fairfield County Commissioners, said the raises would not be reinstated unless everyone in the agency could receive them.

"We are one team; what's good for one is good for all of us," he said. "I never considered giving an increase to anyone without it being available to everyone."

Fairfield County Human Resources Director Aundrea Cordle accepted her 3 percent raise from the County Commissioners. Her position is financed equally by the commissioners and Fairfield County J&FS. She said she will take five unpaid days from the agency to balance out the 1.5 percent of the pay raise.

"I wasn't asked to do that (take five unpaid days), but it was something I felt compelled to do," said Cordle.

Orlando said Fairfield County has one advantage over other counties is the recent levy passed to help fund needed services.

The governor's proposed budget cuts nearly \$700,000 during the next two years for child and adult protective services. County voters passed the Protective Services measure in 2008, a 10-year, 1-mill operating levy that will provide \$2.4 million annually for adult and child protective services, starting in 2010.

Orlando said none of the levy money would be used to balance financial shortfalls in other areas of the agency.

Fairfield County Commissioner Mike Kiger applauded the Fairfield County J&FS staff for concessions made to save the agency money.

"I think any time you have public servants, they should consider those cuts," Kiger said. "They are there to serve the public."

Steve Snelson, 51, was glad the agency's employees were willing to accept the cost saving measures.

"A lot of people have to make sacrifices now," he said. "We all have to cut back."

Snelson said a wage freeze, reduction in hours or furloughs are better than the alternative.

"I'd always rather see people take a pay cut than lose their job," he said.

