

BUTLER COUNTY, OHIO LAYSOFF JOB AND FAMILY SERVICES WORKERS



Butler County, Ohio, is making some serious staff reductions in two of its most vital areas in the current economy: Job and Family Services. The county will begin a mass layoff at the agency in order to close a \$3 million gap in the budget that was created by a decrease in the amount of funding given by the state and federal governments. The layoffs, which will cut roughly one third of the staff from this office, are expected to include 16 caseworkers. The agency will close its Middletown office. The decision was made public, and final at a county commission meeting on Thursday. There the JFS Director, Jerome Kearns, laid out his decision and then informed the agencies non-union staff to get ready to cut another \$400,000 free from the budget. While some of the employees being cut are union members, of the AFSCME Local 3062, this will not stop the cuts. Unlike the situation in the New York school system, where a ratifying a new contract could potentially save jobs, there seems to be little hope for the staff of this agency. While no specific date has been given for the employees to be let go it could happen in as little as 10 days from the time the pink slips are handed out. This is all the time that the county is required according to their union contract. Apparently, the agency heads did make some effort to stave off layoffs before making this painful decision. The head of the agency spoke to the county commissioners about getting some slack in the budget but since the county has budget issues of its own they were not able to give the agency any extra monies to work with. The agency leaders also talked with the union, prior to announcing layoffs, to discuss options for balancing the budget without cutting jobs. Options such as furloughs were discussed, but they were not enough to help make up a fiscal deficit of the size. Past efforts to work with the union, and save jobs over the last couple of years, have included workers agreeing to a pay freeze and cutting back the number of hours worked from 40 to 38, for full time employees. The union seems to be supporting the decision to let go part of the work force as a necessary step towards fiscal solvency. Charity Sizemore, the president of AFSCME Local 3062, told a local reporter on the scene, I do not believe that if management had known this was going to happen they would have hired three people a month ago." The irony of the situation is that the remaining caseworkers may now have to help their former colleagues to apply for unemployment and family services. Of course, this reduction in staff will mean that the time it takes to get benefits will also be delayed. "The public is going to have to understand that when you are losing 26 caseworkers, the time it takes to get your benefits determined will change regardless of how hard you try," Kelly Suit, the vice president of the union told a local reporter.

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