

CALIFORNIA CUTS MENTAL HEALTH WORKERS AGAINST OSHA MANDATE



When it comes to working with the mentally unstable it is generally considered that more workers is a good thing. When it comes to dealing with intricacies of state budget planning it is generally considered that more workers is a bad thing, at least when money is short it is. Both of these ideas are born out of a real and important need. In order to give quality care, and to remain safe themselves, when dealing with a group of highly unpredictable and often uncooperative patients who have a real chance of becoming violent. When the budget comes down the state budget however many priorities need to be balanced. Yes, a state has to take care of its mentally ill residents, but they also need to educate the students of the state, make sure that the roads are in working order, and keep police and fire fighters in their jobs. Today the need for balance between those things is playing out in the city of Sacramento, California where the California Department of Mental Health is getting ready to cut jobs despite the safety recommendations by another state agency. The agency issuing the safety recommendations, the California Division of Occupational Safety and Health (OSHA) issued what amounts to a demand to the California Department of Mental Health that mandated an increase in the number of staffers in state mental health facilities. This increase was put into place because of recent violent attacks against workers in these facilities. Instead of hiring more workers, which would have been good news for state health workers the California Department of Mental Health instead issued layoff notices to their workers. Hundreds of workers have been given notice that they may be short of a job in the near future. Groups such as Safety Now, which is dedicated to the well being of California mental health workers, have already come out against the move. They have petitioned the California Division of Occupational Safety and Health, asking them to put a stop to the layoffs planned by the California Department of Mental Health, citing the logic that having fewer workers in the facilities would make working conditions less safe for employees. The California Department of Mental Health is closing in the near future, soon to be replaced by a new department that will oversee the mental health facilities, and several other state health care resources. This soon to be change of leadership, and non-existence of the organization, may be why the California Department of Mental Health feels that it can make recommendations contrary to the mandate it was given. At this point what do they have to lose? The plans were submitted to the California Department of Personnel Administration on the 28th of February and they were approved. The good news is that the layoff notices are over exaggerated. State agencies are required, by law, to submit notices to anyone whose job may be impacted by the cuts even if they are not set to be laid off. Some experts are estimating that as many as three times the number of layoff notices have been given, then cuts will be made.

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