

# Contra Costa cuts millions from employment, human services department

By Matthias Gafni

CONTRA COSTA TIMES

Posted: 12/09/2008 04:46:10 PM PST

MARTINEZ — Contra Costa supervisors cut \$18.5 million from one county department Tuesday, sending more than 100 pink slips to employees, many of whom pleaded passionately for their jobs at a standing room only meeting.

The county administrator warned that the board should expect in February to cut an additional \$10 million to \$24 million from the budget, not including whatever funding gaps may arise when the state balances its \$28 billion deficit.

With Tuesday's cuts in the Employment and Human Services Department, the county has hacked almost \$112 million from its total budget.

Administrator David Twa predicted more income losses — a 2 percent to 8 percent decline in assessed property values next year in a county that has had 8 percent annual growth.

The immediate concerns are so grave that Twa has called department heads to discuss consolidating services.

"It is bleak. It is painful. It is difficult. There is no easy solution," Twa said.

The supervisors focused on cutting \$18.5 million from the Employment and Human Services Department because of a loss in state funding. After a Nov. 18 workshop, they asked director Joe Valentine to maximize state and federal matching dollars, so his recommendations hit child welfare and adult protective services social workers hardest. Those two programs receive the most county funding, with less state and federal assistance.

"This is the most painful proposal I ever submitted in my entire career," Valentine said. "It's been a source of personal anguish for me."

The cuts could eliminate 203 positions, about half of them staffed. Laid-off workers' final day will be Dec. 31.

Employees have discussed unpaid work furloughs to save money, but involuntary time off needs union approval.

If there was a bright spot Tuesday, it was the rescue of the foster services and adoption program, which initially had been recommended for return to state control. Although the programs will have half their current funding, they remain under county control.

"You don't destroy what has taken so long to build. Contra Costa was an ordinary program 20 years ago, today it should be a model for the nation," said David Mitchell of Danville, as his wife held their 6-week-old foster baby. "The old way to do it, was a child comes into the system and you take a list of foster parents and throw a dart and that's how it goes. That's not how it happens here."

The 69-year-old who has fostered more than 400 children sat next to San Ramon resident Ken Bach and his 11-year-old adopted daughter.

"I'm very outraged by the thought of having kids not getting sent to well-adjusted, good homes," Bach said.

Seventy-nine social workers are scheduled to lose their jobs, increasing caseloads of those who remain. The same will happen to the staff managing needs of families receiving child welfare services.

Adult protective services staff will be reduced from 14 to five.

Many of the more than 100 speakers said the cuts will jeopardize children and elderly clients' as fewer abuse cases will be investigated.

They read poems, sang songs, showed family photos and brought their foster and adopted children to the podium.

Reach Matthias Gafni at 925-952-5053 or [mgafni@bayareanewsgroup.com](mailto:mgafni@bayareanewsgroup.com).