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## Sheriff averts deputy layoffs

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MARTINEZ -- The Contra Costa Sheriff's Office will narrowly dodge laying off deputies, but preserving the patrol force will not come without a price.

To save front-line patrol jobs, the agency will leave vacant high-ranking manager posts such as captains, cut overtime and supplies, and rely on a projected \$1 million increase in federal reimbursements for housing federal prisoners and illegal immigrants in the county's jails.

"This is the worst budget year we have ever faced as a department," Sheriff David Livingston said after the Board of Supervisors voted Tuesday to accept his budget. "The public should know that we are cutting to the bone, but we decided we would not touch the patrol deputies. We will make it through this."

District Attorney Mark Peterson also will avoid predicted layoffs of district attorneys through vacancies and internal adjustments.

The board vote on the departments' budgets comes after the supervisors, Livingston and Peterson settled a dispute over the extent of the county's authority over their spending plans.

Historically, the county has required elected department heads to submit lists of the positions targeted for elimination required to balance their budgets. Unlike the federal government, local agencies cannot run a deficit; supervisors say they are accountable if any department overspends.

Livingston and Peterson successfully challenged the county, arguing that only they could decide how

to spend their agencies' money.

Not only did the men object to the imposition of layoffs, but they also opposed the loss of control over positions they may later need. Once the Board

of Supervisors eliminates a specific job, only they can restore it. If a position is left unfunded, the sheriff or district attorney may fill it later if they reorganize or find money.

Livingston initially asked for a \$20 million increase in his \$62 million budget, which included eight additional patrol deputies. The supervisors nixed all his requests and sought even greater cuts in their push to close a \$50 million countywide budget deficit.

County Administrator David Twa warned Tuesday that the budgets of every department could deteriorate further based on the state finance plan, which is still in limbo, and legislation that will shift state responsibilities to counties.

The county is also pursuing salary and benefit cuts through negotiations with most of its employee unions, whose contracts will expire at the end of June.

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