

# DuPage workers criticize layoffs

## Probation officers decry DuPage cuts

October 24, 2007

The chorus of anguish over proposed cuts in DuPage County's budget grew louder Tuesday, when two dozen county probation officers appeared at a County Board meeting to warn that convicts on probation won't get the supervision they need to stay away from crime if the board follows through on proposed layoffs.

The budget, which goes into effect with the 2008 fiscal year beginning Dec. 1, calls for laying off 28 of the probation department's 131 staff members.

Their appearance came a day after DuPage Treasurer Gwen Henry said the proposed cuts in her office could leave her unable to perform duties required by law, which could lead to fines from the state.

Probation officers came to the board meeting wearing green T-shirts bearing the name of their union, the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, or AFSCME.

"We can't function if the proposed budget goes through," said Dana Andrewson, a probation officer and president of the AFSCME Local 3328, to which DuPage probation officers belong.

"We supervise 4,000 convicted offenders who live in our community," Andrewson said in a statement to the board. "They live next door to you."

A reduced staff means higher caseloads for remaining probation officers, which in turn means less time to monitor convicts' compliance with goals and programs designed to keep them from straying back to criminal activity, he said after the meeting.

Board Chairman Robert Schillerstrom said the probation representatives' warning were not just posturing.

"To do the job that they want to do and need to do for the people of DuPage County, they need more resources," Schillerstrom said after the meeting. However, he said the county's financial plight leaves no choice.

The cuts, including the loss of 240 jobs and a \$53 million spending drop, will go into effect unless a pending bill that would let DuPage impose a sales tax on cigarettes of \$1 per pack is approved by the state legislature and signed by the governor. The cigarette tax could raise an estimated \$25 million a year or more for the county, Schillerstrom said.

Andrewson said the union would help lobby the legislature to pass the bill.

"AFSCME is pretty well known for hitting the streets," he said.

The county treasurer's office, which collects real estate taxes and distributes the funds to other local governments, faces \$153,500 in budget reductions. Henry said in a statement Monday that her office may end up paying state-imposed fines if her office can't distribute the funds on time.

She said her office distributed about \$500 million in real estate tax revenue to other local governments on June 1. The proposed reduction of her staff from 22 to 19 employees could put the disbursements behind schedule, Henry said, and the state would impose a fine on her office of \$50,000 for each day the distribution is late. Those fines could negate a good portion of what the budget cuts were intended to save, she said.