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## County targets 60 for layoffs

Need to eliminate \$12 million deficit means cuts are in the forecast

By Chad Selweski

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David Boyd was visiting his 83-year-old mother at Martha T. Berry Medical Care Facility on Friday morning when the news hit.

The 217-bed facility may have to cut \$700,000 from its budget, forcing 10 employee layoffs. Boyd worried about the impact on his mother, Sara Jane Boyd, who suffers from dementia but has enjoyed a "good, decent quality of life" at the county-run facility for the past four years.

"The aides and the nurses, they're stretched already. That (cutback) would mean cutting some of the services," said Boyd, a Clinton Township resident. "I ... don't know what I'd do without it. The care is excellent."

Martha T. Berry would be hardest hit under a \$4.7 million budget-balancing plan that calls for 60 potential layoffs spread over 18 departments. The plan, which is up for approval by the county board's Budget Committee on Thursday, would be the final round of cuts designed to nearly eliminate a \$12 million deficit.

In addition to the Martha T. Berry layoffs, the Health Department could suffer eight layoffs, the Macomb County Library may face a reduction of five workers, and the foster care program and Information Technology Department could each lose four employees.

The plan also calls for the layoff of 11 building security guards and six staffers at the Facilities and Operations Department, which maintains and repairs county facilities.

In December and earlier this month, the county board adopted \$7 million in spending cuts and revenue increases. But board Chairman Bill Crouchman, in a Thursday memo

to department heads, said that the county faces a structural deficit with no easy solutions. As an alternative to layoffs, Crouchman said departments would have the option of eliminating programs.

Shell-shocked department heads were given no advanced notice of the cutbacks, and were scrambling on Friday to figure out how the cuts would affect them.

Tom Kalkofen, Health Department director, said he cannot cut mandated programs so layoffs might hit key programs, such as those that battle water pollution.

"Some programs aren't mandated so do some of those go on a priority list? For example, beach monitoring. Do ... we cut a program like that? Those are big questions," said Kalkofen, who faces a \$590,000 reduction.

The prospect of layoffs also rattled the county's 26 labor unions, which currently face contract negotiations in which the county seeks employee concessions. Donna Cangemi, president of the largest union, said she has received many calls from worried workers.

"This is a very sad situation," said Cangemi, who leads the 900 members of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees Local 411. "I'm hoping it's not written in stone and that we can have some discussion, because I don't want to see people lose their jobs."

At the Macomb County Library, Director Darlene LaBelle said her 58 employees have already dealt with service cutbacks.

"This is going to be another \$500,000 reduction after we cut \$510,000 last year," she said. "It's certainly not a drop in the bucket."

Sheriff William Hackel, who oversees the part-time security guards posted at more than a dozen county buildings, said the budget proposal lacks a sense of the big picture. Reducing the number of guards would mean closing some building entrances or leaving some unprotected against people armed with weapons, Hackel said.

The Budget Committee meets Thursday because that is the self-imposed budget-balancing deadline. But some commissioners doubt the proposal, put forward by Budget Committee Chairman Don Brown, can gain majority approval. Brown said he hasn't made an effort to round up the necessary 14 votes.

Past discussions about major budget cuts, particularly at the library or Martha T. Berry, have prompted a public backlash.

Martha T. Berry is a 234-employee facility that serves as home to some of Macomb County's most chronically ill residents. Patients range from teenagers to senior citizens who need long-term care because of accidents, illness or disease that has left them paralyzed, comatose or incapacitated. For poor patients, Martha T. Berry is a safety net, a care facility of "last resort."

"I'm just hearing this now," facility administrator Josephine Savalle-Dunn said of the potential layoffs. "We're just trying to maintain our day-to-day operations."

Brown, a Washington Township Republican, said the budget plan does not mandate layoffs and each department head will be given the flexibility to propose alternative ways of cutting back. But he will ask the committee to approve spending-cut targets for most departments so that the deficit is chopped down to just \$428,000.

Nearly every department has already made some reductions. Under the Brown plan, 28 departments and agencies would face additional cuts ranging from \$700,000 to \$1,000.

"I'm not a mind reader. I don't know what the board is going to do," Brown said. "I'm saying that we're running out of options."

The Budget Committee meets at 9 a.m. Thursday in downtown Mount Clemens, on the ninth floor of the Administration Building, located at Cass and Main Street.

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