

76 workers to lose jobs in state cuts

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ALBANY — Seventy-one employees at the South Beach Psychiatric Center and five at the Staten Island Office of the Department of Motor Vehicles are expected to be among 7,587 state employees to get pink slips today.

The employees will be told that they will be terminated effective April 7 to help close a potential state deficit put at \$1.8 billion.

The Staten Island Developmental Center in Willowbrook and the College of Staten Island (CSI) will be spared layoffs.

James Walsh, deputy director of the developmental center, said the facility has already lost 400 jobs in the last year. He said the center could not absorb additional cuts and still comply with court staffing requirements.

But Walsh said more layoffs were possible later in the year as patients move into community facilities.

CSI was slated to lose 26 teaching positions and 36 non-teaching jobs under Cuomo's original proposal.

But the layoffs were averted because the City University developed an alternate plan, calling for reductions in maintenance and capital projects instead of layoffs, according to CSI officials.

As a result of the university's plan, only 61 employees will be laid off throughout its senior colleges — compared to the 558 planned in Cuomo's original proposal. A spokesman for CSI President Edmond Volpe said none of the layoffs will occur at CSI.

South Beach officials said they expect most of the 71 layoffs there will occur in administration and out-patient services.

Norman Condit, director of the Staten Island motor vehicle office in New Springville, said he informed five of his 54 employees that they would be laid off on April 7 — unless the Legislature restores funds to the agency's budget.

"They reacted the way you would expect anyone to react to such news," Condit said. "It's not easy time to be out of work."

He said the workers generally were among the most recently hired. "This includes housewives who returned to the work force and young people just entering the work force for the first time," he said.

Condit said he hopes services to the public will not be affected.

"We're hoping the public will not see any effect from this," Condit said. "We are going to use all the shortcuts and management techniques we can to avoid service reductions."

Timmoty Russert, spokesman for Cuomo, said he expected a majority of the workers to be hired back during the fiscal year as openings occur as a result of retirements and attrition.

Here are excerpts from the letter being sent to all of the laid-off state employees:

"As you know, New York State is in the midst of a serious fiscal problem. In order to close the enormous gap between revenues and expenditures, the state has been required to propose a number of drastic steps.

"The proposed budget suggests raising approximately \$900 million in revenues. That meets about half the problem. The difference is to be made up by reducing requests for expenditures and reducing our work force. The largest part of our expenses for state purposes is spent on personnel. This year's budget contains more than \$300 million for the negotiated salary increase. That funding remains intact because the state will honor the collective bargaining agreement.

"No one wants layoffs. Unfortunately, closing the budget gap requires some layoffs. The number has been calculated at about 4 percent of the work force. The state government would prefer that reductions be done by attrition and voluntary retirements. As of the moment, however, it has not been established that sufficient voluntary retirements can be achieved or that other actions are possible to make layoffs unnecessary. The state continues to work to that end; in the meantime the process of layoffs must continue..."