

Originally Posted Online: July 09, 2011, 7:36 pm
Last Updated: July 09, 2011, 11:31 pm

Illinois budget woes mean fewer workers at social agencies, too

[Comment on this story](#)

By Nicole Lauer, nlauer@qconline.com



Photo:

Reductions and delays in state funding led Rock Island County social services agencies, governments and school districts to lay off at least 37 people during the fiscal year that ended June 30, according to a survey of three dozen such groups by The Dispatch and The Rock Island Argus.

The number of layoffs is down sharply from the previous year, when those groups laid off at least 117 people as Illinois' budget problems led to sharp reductions in state contributions. The various agencies said they are adjusting how services are delivered or utilizing lines of credit to make do as they wait on a combined \$18 million from the state.

Judith Gethner, executive director of Illinois Partners for Human Service, a coalition of 585 not-for-profit human service providers, said the situation in Rock Island County reflects what's going on all around the state. All told, she said, the state owed \$723 million to agencies that provide human services as of June 29 of this year.

She said her group won't know what that translates to in terms of new layoffs until a survey of member agencies this fall.

Despite the many challenges posed by less revenue, spokesmen at several agencies echoed the perspective of Rock Island County Probation Department director David VanLandegen.

"It's better today," said Mr. VanLandegen, who said payments continue to be late but not nearly as late as before. "Not great, certainly could be much better, but we are more stabilized by some level."

Rock Island County Health Department administrator Wendy Trute also said things are more stable there compared to one year ago.

"We were, as you may recall, on the verge (of cuts) last year about this time because the state was behind, at one point, more than \$1 million in payments to us," Ms. Trute said. "But this year it has been fairly steady and not near as late as last year ... We're very cautiously optimistic."

Nicole Durbin of Family Resources said 1.5 full-time equivalent staff members were eliminated in the past year and four vacant positions remained unfilled. Despite a delay of \$282,765 in funding from the state, Ms. Durbin said "the last six months have been a lot better on payments than the prior six months."

Transitions Mental Health Center CEO Gary Weinstein said eight staff members were cut in July of last year. Because of reduced state funding, eligibility criteria for receiving services has narrowed, and Mr. Weinstein estimated he has 30 to 40 clients who are no longer receiving needed services.

Several agencies reported scaled-back programming in the past fiscal year because of state funding: the Youth Service Bureau reassigned staff from low-income families to families with insurance; Robert Young Center implemented a new co-pay system requiring those without insurance to pay upfront; and Western Illinois Area Agency on Aging provided fewer meals to homebound seniors.

Like many agencies, Bethany for Children and Families reported some state-contracted payments are three to four months late. The agency cut two positions last September, and another staff member was cut in the new fiscal year when the state eliminated funding for the teen parent services program.

Despite the grim news from many agencies, Casa Guanajuato Quad Cities and Children's Therapy Center reported increasing staff. Executive directors from the agencies said multiple revenue streams means late state payments have been less of a hardship. Casa Guanajuato said the community has responded to the needs of the fast-growing Hispanic population. Children's Therapy Center also said funding issues have been minimized because of the population it serves.

"It's primarily a large number of birth-to-3 children with disabilities, and I think they are very cautious when it comes to that population that there aren't significant delays," said center director George McDoniel.

Casa Guanajuato, Children's Therapy Center and the Early Childhood Coalition all said they are using lines of credit to bridge the state funding gaps.

Representatives from the Boys and Girls Club of the Mississippi Valley and The Arc of Rock Island County reported they are benefiting from an expedited payment program through the state which has made their state payments pretty timely. ARC director of development and communications Maureen Dickinson said the program lasts only six months and she has been told the state is not accepting new applications. Both agencies reported no layoffs in the past year.

As the new fiscal year begins, new challenges and questions arise. Like other agencies reported, Child Abuse Council community relations manager Rondi Doyle said she's been through this before and the agency will make do until more is known.

"We'll just wait until Illinois makes a decision and we'll go from there."

Schools

Rock Island County school districts said the state owes them more than \$6.5 million. Figures and comments were not available from Riverdale and Rockridge school districts. With the exception of the Moline School District, which laid off 59 temporary and regular staff members, few layoffs were reported. The Rock Island-Milan School District reduced five staff members and the Silvis School District reduced two full-time staff members and one part-time bus monitor. Instead of layoffs, superintendent Kristin Humphries said the East Moline School District realized a savings of \$460,000 by offering early retirement incentive programs.

Government

Municipal governments in Rock Island County reported they are owed about \$3.9 million from the state. The city of Moline reported eight layoffs caused in part by a lack of state funding in the last fiscal year. Rock Island reported another five positions going unfilled. The remaining local city governments and Rock Island County reported no layoffs. Rock Island County is owed \$2.6 million from the state, according to board chairman Jim Bohnsack.

Staff writer Dawn Neuses contributed to this report.