

State calls for public pension overhaul

A plan recommends boosting rates paid by workers and local governments.

By Laura A. Bischoff, Staff Writer

10:17 PM Thursday, August 27, 2009

COLUMBUS — Facing billions of dollars in future funding gaps, Ohio's public pension systems are getting ready to ask lawmakers to spread the pain among retirees, public employees and taxpayers.

The Ohio Police and Fire Pension Fund board approved a plan this week that recommends boosting the rates paid by workers and local governments to cover pensions for cops and firefighters.

Already, cities pay 19.5 cents and 24 cents toward firefighter and police pensions for every \$1 paid in wages. And while police and firefighters chip in 10 cents, roughly two-thirds of the 900 jurisdictions "pick up" the worker share.

Even a small jump in the contribution rates could cost taxpayers across the state millions of dollars.

The police and fire pension plan would also delay cost of living increases for retirees and bump the retirement age to 52 from 48 for police and firefighters hired after Jan. 1, 2011.

Ohio Retirement Study Council Director Aristotle Hutras described it as a "shared pain" plan.

Each system is required to be funded for 30 years into the future. Skyrocketing health care costs and plummeting investment returns necessitated the changes.

While the police and fire pension fund board approved its plan, the other four boards are still considering changes, Hutras said. Collectively, the systems cover 1.7 million public workers, retirees and former government employees.

Nearly all the proposed changes require legislative approval. Hutras said a pension reform bill may be put before lawmakers yet this year.

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Ohio to return \$4.1 million in donated funds used for budget

By Associated Press

POSTED: 08:36 a.m. EDT, Aug 28, 2009

COLUMBUS: Ohio is replenishing two funds of donated money tapped to close a budget gap, and two additional accounts also will be repaid.

The Office of Budget and Management issued a memo Thursday saying the administration would return \$2.8 million taken from funds to fight blindness and encourage organ donations. That money comes from \$1 contributions when people get driver licenses. The raid on those accounts was first reported by The Columbus Dispatch last week.

The memo also ordered the restoration of \$1.3 million meant for motorcycle safety and anti-smoking programs.

Budget Director Pari Sabety wrote that the motorcycle money comes from various sources, complicating the transfer, and that the dip into the tobacco fund may go against a court order.

Information from the Columbus Dispatch, <http://www.dispatch.com>.

Find this article at:

http://www.ohio.com/news/break_news/55709892.html

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.

OHIO PRISONS MAY JAM SIGNALS FROM INMATE CELL PHONES IF PENDING FEDERAL BILL IS ENACTED

The Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction said Thursday it might begin to electronically jam signals from contraband cell phones in prisons if legislation awaiting a U.S. Senate vote is enacted.

A measure creating a process for Ohio and other states to seek Federal Communications Commission waivers for jamming equipment cleared the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation earlier this month.

The wireless communications industry favors alternative technology that enables prison officials to locate contraband cell phones within facilities and confiscate them.

Although offenders in Ohio prisons are prohibited from possessing cell phones, the department said 66 of the devices have been confiscated since January 2008.

"It's a problem any time offenders are in possession of contraband in prison. Cell phones can be used to commit other crimes and to facilitate offender behavior we don't support in prisons," said Julie Walburn, DRC communications director.

"We don't have the technology to actually jam cell phone use currently," Ms. Walburn said in an interview.

"We would certainly explore it if it was permitted. Whether we would use it statewide or in certain facilities would be based on need," she said.

Awaiting a U.S. Senate vote is [legislation](#) Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-Texas) introduced that would allow a governor to petition the FCC for operation of a wireless jamming device in a specific correctional facility.

The FCC would have two months to accept or deny a petition. A waiver that was granted for use of the equipment would be good for 10 years.

Ohio previously joined the Association of State Correctional Administrators in supporting the legislation. The organization said in [a summary of the measure](#) that although new technologies are being developed to detect cell phones in prison, only jamming stops their use.

[CTIA-The Wireless Association](#), a Washington, D.C. trade group representing cellular and all other sectors of wireless communications, said it is "in complete alignment" with Sen. Hutchison about the need to prohibit wireless access by persons who are not supposed to have it.

"While the CTIA believes policy should favor non-interfering technologies, we appreciate Senator Hutchison's willingness to redraft her bill to protect commercial and emergency wireless communications from interference caused by the use of jamming systems," Steve Largent, association president, said when the measure cleared committee.

CTIA members include Verizon Wireless, U.S. Cellular, Cincinnati Bell Wireless, and Sprint Nextel Corp.

Ms. Walburn said a number of companies offer cell phone detection equipment. She said Ohio previously used some of the technology, but is not doing so at present because the particular gear did not work as well as officials had hoped.

Woman Retires From Ohio Prison System After 27 Years

Thursday, August 27, 2009 5:54 PM

VIDEO

COLUMBUS, Ohio —



Andrea Carson has been the voice for Ohio's prison systems since 1983, but Thursday was her last day.

Carson had what some might call an unusual job, being the voice of Ohio's 32 prisons. During her years, she witnessed 27 executions.

"It hasn't taken a toll on me in any way. It hasn't left me scarred or harmed in any way. Actually if anything else, it made me more compassionate," said Andrea Carson, former spokeswoman for the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction.

Compassionate for those who can't speak for themselves, which became an eye-opening part of the job.

"A lot of people have support systems, but I've seen a lot of people through this process that have not and do not have support systems."

Through the years, Carson says she's seen a lot of changes but none more than technology, and the media.

"Often times the media calls us and tells us what is going on in one of our prisons before we would be able to get that information from the prison."

Carson's retirement begins immediately and was very frank when asked about her plans, "Nothing! I'm going to enjoy my life with my children and my wonderful husband. We are going to travel and relax and just have a good retired life!"

A life completely different than that lived inside this career, "you just can't walk off the street and work inside a prison, it takes a special kind of person." Carson goes on to say, "I was proud because I work with awesome people, but more importantly we didn't have anything to hide. When we make mistakes we told the truth about it. When we did things well we told the truth about it, so our integrity was always in tact and that made me very pleased and proud to be able to speak for the department."

The department didn't waste anytime appointing her successor. Julie Walburn has been training with Carson for two months, and worked the last two executions. Walburn knows she has big shoes to fill, but is eager to get started, "I'll probably have my own style of doing business, but certainly want to do so in the same vain of integrity and honesty and accountability to the people of Ohio." Walburn begins immediately.

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August 28, 2009

Statewide furloughs begin at Green Bay prison

Employees will be staffed at holiday levels

By Patti Zarling
pzarling@greenbaypressgazette.com

ALLOUEZ — Like other state employees, workers at the Green Bay Correctional Institution must take 16 days of unpaid furlough within the next two years.

The first furlough day for Department of Corrections employees is today.

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But because prisons are open 24 hours, seven days a week, some employees still will have to punch the clock.

The Green Bay prison, like others throughout the state, will operate with a smaller crew, similar to holiday staff levels, said Carrie Templeton of the department. She would not share specific numbers of employees on duty, citing security issues.

"It causes a challenge," she said. "Safety is our No. 1 concern. We want to make sure everything continues to run smoothly."

Gov. Jim Doyle approved the furloughs this summer in an effort to close the state's \$6.5 billion biennial budget gap.

The site in Allouez is a maximum-security prison for men and has a population of about 1,092, according to state Department of Corrections spokesman John Dipko. It has about 362 employees, he said.

Dipko said each institution has a slightly different furlough plan based on specific needs.

Visiting and recreation hours will not change today here, Dipko said. But there will be no Wednesday visiting hours starting in September, he said.

In general, furloughs will force prison education programs to be canceled and canteens closed that day, Templeton said. Furloughs also will reduce food and maintenance staff and make unavailable most services to the general public that day.

People should call ahead to the individual facilities if they're planning to visit a corrections office or institution, Templeton said. The department's central office will be closed to the public today.

Shuffling staff and assigning furlough could lead to some people to work more than 40 hours a week, she said.

"The furlough plan is designed to minimize overtime," she said. "It could happen, it does happen now anyway, when unexpected things happen."



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Overtime concerns raised about Department of Corrections furloughs

By [Stacy Forster](#) and [Patrick Marley](#) of the Journal Sentinel

Posted: Aug. 27, 2009

Madison — y of the state Department of Corrections operations will be shut down Friday for its first agency-wide furlough day, but some correctional officers are concerned the furlough plan could increase costs.

Critics argue overtime costs could rise with the need to cover the shifts of those taking unpaid days off, but department officials said the plan is designed to minimize overtime and significant increases aren't anticipated.

"We're anticipating because we're going to be running on a much leaner staff, we would have less overtime," said Deputy Secretary Ismael Ozanne. While there could be some overtime costs, "we don't expect it to be significant."

Critics say furloughing security personnel could increase costs because some of their shifts would have to be covered with overtime, which costs one and a half times the normal pay rate.

"Furloughing 24-7 operations is going to reduce their desired savings," said a statement from Daniel Meehan, a Waupun Correctional Institution officer and local union president.

Assembly Speaker Mike Sheridan (D-Janesville) said the situation warrants a closer look.

"I think we need to drill down on that and look at those cases specifically," Sheridan said. "If it's costing us more, it doesn't make any sense to do that, right?&ensp.&ensp.&ensp. We have to say, 'OK, it's not a one size fits all,' so what can we do to adjust that?"

The Journal Sentinel has reported on soaring overtime costs at the department in recent years, which has boosted some officers' pay to six figures, but the department has worked to bring overtime costs down in recent months. The budget lawmakers passed this summer requires state workers to take 16 unpaid days off over the next two years. The agency has set eight department-wide days, and workers will have to take the rest at other times.

Some correctional officers already have taken furlough days, but Friday's department-wide furlough day means the prisons will essentially run the way they do on holidays. About 7,000 of the department's 10,000 workers will be on furlough.

Schools and other nonessential operations in prisons will be closed, but cell blocks and infirmaries will still have to be staffed.

"The holiday staffing has been tried and true," Ozanne said. "We do it year in and year out, keeping people safe and dealing with the limited numbers."

For example, if schools are closed, the security officers who monitor the school or who transport inmates to the classrooms wouldn't be needed, Ozanne said.

Officers and employees who work on the designated furlough day will have to take furloughs at other times.

The department's budget has been cut by \$7.8 million a year to account for furloughs, Carrie Templeton, the executive assistant at the Department of Corrections, said in a statement.

Throughout state government, the furloughs are expected to save \$121.2 million over two years, according to the Legislative Fiscal Bureau. Without them, the state would have to lay off up to 1,500 additional employees, officials have said.

Corrections officials said they don't have the data on the effects the furloughs will have on overtime but said the agency will adjust its plans if necessary.

"We've taken a hard look at this and tried to manage it as best we can with public safety and safety of the institutions at the forefront," Ozanne said. "It's too early for people to say that this is going to skyrocket and cause every furlough to be backfilled by time and a half overtime."

Ozanne said the nature of a 24-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week institution means there are always overtime costs due to workers taking sick days or inmates needing emergency transports.

"Just because there's overtime in the institution, that doesn't mean that is created by a furlough," Ozanne said.

Marty Beil, executive director of the Wisconsin State Employees Union, said he did not want to see the state furlough employees, but that once the state decided to do it, he believed applying them across the board was the only fair way to do them.

"Once you start exempting people, where do you stop exempting people?" he said.

Beil said 24-7 operations always generate a lot of overtime, and he didn't know whether the furloughs would cause overtime to spike.

State will monitor OT

State officials will monitor overtime to be sure it doesn't rise as a result of furloughs, said Jennifer Donnelly, director of the Office of State Employment Relations.

Concerns have been raised about safety of correctional officers.

Paul Mertz, a correctional officer at Redgranite Correctional Institution for three years, said the need for a secure institution means that most posts need to be filled at all times.

"Each one of those people has a responsibility for security in some measure in an incident or for an emergency situation," said Mertz, whose letter to the editor on the furloughs was published in the Journal Sentinel last week.

Senate Republican Leader Scott Fitzgerald (R-Juneau) said the security of correctional officers is paramount, and the state shouldn't do anything that would put them in danger.

"I don't know if the furloughs are appropriate," Fitzgerald said. "I certainly wouldn't want to jeopardize safety at all for those guys, and if that is the case and it's truly happening, I wouldn't support the furloughs."

Ozanne said safety concerns are a priority for department officials.

"We're not looking to put the staff working in harm's way," Ozanne said.



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Calif. to shift largest juvenile prison to adults

By DON THOMPSON (AP) – 11 hours ago

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — California plans to transform its largest juvenile prison into a lockup for 1,200 adults to save money and ease crowding in the adult system, officials said Thursday.

Corrections officials said they no longer need the space for 400 youthful offenders, who will be transferred to the state's remaining five juvenile facilities. Recent changes in state law have sharply cut the number of juvenile offenders in state custody to about 1,700 statewide.

Heman G. Stark Youth Correctional Facility in Chino will be outfitted to hold adults, possibly those with medical or mental health problems, said Scott Kernan, an undersecretary with the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation.

It would cost about \$500 million to build a new adult prison, but the youth facility can be altered with razor wire, an electric fence and other safeguards for about a third of that cost, Kernan said.

The facility already is being used for 600 adults transferred from the nearby California Institution for Men after more than 1,000 inmates rioted there Aug. 8, destroying or damaging several dormitories.

The department lost 1,300 beds in the riot, so "the relief of overcrowding is sorely needed," Kernan said.

Prisons already were jammed to nearly double their designed capacity, prompting federal judges earlier this year to order the state to reduce its inmate population by 40,000 inmates over two years.

The state Senate last week approved a plan that would reduce the population by about 37,000 inmates over two years by sending more inmates to local jails or home confinement. The plan is stalled in the Assembly, which plans to take up a scaled-down version on Monday.

The department said it will issue 1,240 layoff notices this week to employees in the juvenile justice section.

Closing Stark will save an estimated \$35 million to \$40 million, said Bernard Warner, who runs the Division of Juvenile Justice, though the savings will be offset by the cost of converting the facility to house adults.

The division has been harshly criticized for its high cost, budgeted at \$252,000 per ward this year. Warner said the division has since cut its cost per ward to about \$200,000. The high cost is because the state's closure of juvenile facilities has not kept pace with the declining number of wards, though the state has closed eight youth facilities since 2003.

Closing Stark will bring the ratio back to a proper balance, and no more closures are planned, Warner said.

Republican state lawmakers have said the department could function with as few as two of the remaining five youth facilities to save more money. Corrections experts have suggested all the remaining juvenile delinquents could be transferred back to counties.

Prison reform groups praised the announcement.

"Stark youth prison has long been known as one of the worst of the worst youth prisons in the state," Zachary Norris, director of Oakland-based Books Not Bars, said in a statement. "This definitely is a step in the right direction for the state, but California's juvenile justice system needs a comprehensive overhaul."

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August 27, 2009

Torched prison did not have sprinklers

By *Stephenie Steitzer*
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FRANKFORT, Ky. — Northpoint Training Center, which was severely damaged by fire in the worst inmate riot in modern Kentucky history, was not equipped with sprinklers, despite early assertions by a Department of Corrections official that it was.

Northpoint is not required under state law to have sprinkler systems because it was built before they became a requirement in the modern fire code, Justice Cabinet spokeswoman Jennifer Brislin said.

Sprinkler systems also are not required for prisons to be accredited by the American Correctional Association, she said.

“Our priority is on making sure the buildings are safe and secure,” she said. “Since (sprinkler systems) aren’t immediately required, they obviously are meted out against the other needs of the institutions in the department.”

Six buildings at Northpoint were burned, and eight inmates and eight corrections officers suffered minor injuries, after inmates began setting fires and trashing the buildings last Friday night.

No inmates escaped, and no hostages were taken at the prison, which is about 30 miles south of Lexington. The inmates were brought under control late Friday.

On Saturday the state moved roughly 700 prisoners to other facilities, with 200 going to the privately run Marion Adjustment Center in St. Mary, about an hour away. Some 500 remain at Northpoint.

Department of Corrections spokeswoman Mendalyn Cochran said Saturday that all buildings at the prison were equipped with sprinkler systems. Brislin said Thursday that Cochran simply misspoke.

A Department of Corrections investigation into the cause of the disturbance is expected to take several weeks, officials said. Brislin said there is still no cost estimate of the damage.

Kentucky Fire Marshal William Swope Jr., said his office’s investigation into the fire found it was started at multiple points.

He said that the alarm system was working and that the last annual inspection found no code violations at Northpoint.

Asked to provide copies of weekly fire-safety inspection reports at the prison, Brislin said they had been destroyed in the fire.

Swope confirmed that none of the buildings were equipped with sprinkler systems and that they are not required.

He added, however, that “past history tells us that sprinklers do limit the damage.”

The Corrections Department’s policy is to require institutions without sprinkler systems to request funding for them from the legislature.

Brislin said the department does not make specific requests to the legislature for sprinkler system funding but does get a pool of money for maintenance at the state's 13 prisons.

She could not immediately say how much money was budgeted for maintenance this year or whether any of the money was spent on sprinkler systems.

She also could not say how many other prisons lack sprinkler systems.

Reporter Stephenie Steitzer can be reached at (502) 875-5136.

State giving back 'raided' \$4.1 million

Budget-balancing money was from safety and health funds

Friday, August 28, 2009 3:10 AM

BY MARK NIQUETTE

THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

Gov. Ted Strickland promised last week that \$2.8 million would be returned to state accounts set up to prevent blindness and promote organ donations. The accounts were raided in June to help balance the previous state budget.

The Office of Budget and Management issued a memo yesterday to accomplish that, while also ordering the return of \$1.3 million raided from a fund to promote motorcycle safety and from another to pay for anti-smoking programs.

The action was taken after *The Dispatch* questioned the raids of \$1.4 million each from the Save Our Sight fund to prevent blindness in children and the Second Chance fund to help solve the critical shortage of donated organs.

Both accounts were funded by Ohio motorists who are asked to donate \$1 to each when they apply for or renew their driver's license. Strickland said he didn't know about the raids.

During a review of the raids of 70 so-called "rotary funds" to garner a combined \$120 million for the budget, the budget office also decided to restore \$800,000 to the Motorcycle Safety fund and \$500,000 to the Tobacco Use and Prevention Fund.

The motorcycle account receives money from license-registration fees, interest and other sources, and the raid should be reversed because the mixture of different funds complicates the transfer of money, Budget Director J. Pari Sabety said in the memo.

The raid of the tobacco fund "may be inconsistent" with a court order dealing with use of tobacco funds, and that transfer also should be reversed, Sabety said.

A Franklin County judge has ruled that the state cannot tap remnants of Ohio's \$10 billion share of a 1998 legal settlement with cigarette manufacturers for purposes other than anti-smoking programs. The state is appealing.

The state has budgeted \$258 million in tobacco funds for other purposes, but that money is on hold pending resolution of the court challenge.

Agencies will account for the \$4.1 million in state money being restored to the accounts by reducing spending or making other moves before the current two-year budget expires June 30, 2011, Strickland spokesman Keith Dailey said.

The raiding of the rotary funds is not new, and the General Assembly passed a bill last year increasing the amount of money the administration could transfer from the rotary funds to the state's general operating fund.

The idea is to use unspent or excess funds in the accounts to help balance the budget when needed.

Although the administration has defended the raids as necessary to avoid tax increases, the governor conceded that it is wrong to redirect money that Ohioans voluntarily contributed specifically for blindness prevention and organ donation.

In the nine years since Save Our Sight program was created, for example, an estimated 129,195 children have benefited from protective eyewear and other equipment, preventing 2,500 eye injuries.

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