

## Judge asks commissioners to keep part-time secretary position

By Steven Friederich

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**MONTESANO** — Grays Harbor Superior Court Judge Dave Edwards formally asked the county commissioners to restore a part-time secretary position, which is set to be eliminated next month.

“I’m here to ask you to take formal action to withdraw the layoff notice to the .6 secretary at the Juvenile Detention Center,” Edwards told the commissioners. “I don’t want to get into the details of everything pending right now, but clearly we’re making progress and she has been in the crosshairs now for several months and I just don’t think it’s necessary for her to be under this kind of stress when I think we all realize that nobody wants that position to be eliminated.”

Both the commissioners and the judges are in the midst of settlement negotiations for a lawsuit the judges filed in December of 2011.

Last December, the county commissioners directed department heads and elected officials to cut their budgets by 3.5 percent. For most departments that mean a “contra entry,” which means they would have all of this year to figure out how to deal with their potential cuts — from buying fewer supplies or holding employee positions vacant longer to save money.

The Juvenile Detention Center and the Superior Court were not given those options. Instead, a budget proviso adopted with the county’s operating budget reflects the planned cuts the commissioners had in mind for the Superior Court and the Juvenile Detention Center.

The cuts included not filling a vacant probation counselor or two detention officers or a requested promotion, resulting in \$185,566 in cuts to the office. The budget cuts also lay off a part-time secretary position at the Juvenile Detention Center.

The budget proviso states that Juvenile Detention Center is currently staffed at 3.6 secretaries.

“In regard to the secretarial positions, other information available indicates that the workload for these positions is such that the .6 secretarial position should be eliminated,” the proviso states. “The Court refused to provide the information regarding the work of the secretaries as

previously requested. The Board is aware that Department of Health has no secretaries and the Road Department only has two clerk typists.”

The data, today, is a bit out of date since last week the county commissioners approved Public Health to hire a full-time administrative assistant.

On Jan. 4, the .6 employee at Juvenile Detention Center was issued a 30-day layoff notice. Then, a few weeks later, the notice was rescinded and another one was issued. At the insistence of Commissioner Frank Gordon, the date was changed to 60 days from the planned 30-day notice that was going to be issued. If that hadn't been done, she may have been laid off on March 4. Now, she's scheduled to lose her job on April 4. She makes about \$28,000 per year, records show.

“I'm not asking for you to extend the layoff notice like you did last time, I just want you to withdraw it so it's gone from her life so she can continue to do her job and not have to wonder when or what's going to happen,” Edwards told the commissioners.

“I think we should discuss it and then we can talk about it,” Gordon told Edwards. “We will discuss it shortly and we'll make some kind of decision and get right back to you.”

“You're absolutely right and it's unfortunate for her to be right in the middle of the situation,” County Commission Chairman Herb Welch said.

The employee is the only one in the county slated to lose her job this year. The county has restored funding to the Auditor's Office and the Sheriff's Office on other employees that were on the bubble and may have been laid off this year.

The commissioners have said they want to wait until after the first quarter revenue results are back to them before deciding on the other cuts issued to the courts.