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## Hundreds of Westchester County workers may take buyout

Hundreds of Westchester County employees may take a buyout as part of an incentive package to reduce the work force.

County Executive Rob Astorino's office on Friday confirmed that more than 200 employees have filed the necessary paperwork by the June 1 deadline, though spokeswoman Donna Greene said that number could go down because the workers have until the end of the month to finalize their decision.

An exact cost and savings can't be determined until that time, she said. "Until the separation becomes final, it would be premature to comment on any specific positions or departments," Greene said in a statement.

Astorino proposed, and the Board of Legislators last month approved, a voluntary buyout incentive worth \$1,000 per year of service, up to \$30,000, for workers who voluntarily leave county employment.

The two branches also capped the amount of accumulated sick and vacation time that workers can receive, which in some cases translates to tens of thousands of dollars.

By leaving or retiring by the July 1 deadline, workers won't forfeit the accumulated dollars.

The county executive and county board also passed a law requiring nonunion workers to pay between 10 percent and 20 percent of their health insurance premiums, based on salary, to address a large budget deficit and control spiraling costs.

It was a compromise with Astorino's initial proposal and was expected to be part of looming union contract negotiations.

With a stale economy, declining sales tax revenues, and growing mandates and obligations — including escalating health care and pension costs — the proposals were aimed at plugging an anticipated \$166 million budget deficit in 2011 and shrinking the size of county government. It's similar to what other states, counties, municipalities and school districts are faced with. Astorino has said that the savings could minimize the number of possible layoffs.

Gov. David Paterson and the state Legislature on May 28 passed a bill authorizing early retirement incentive for state and local workers, allowing employees to retire without penalty at 55 years of age with a minimum of 25 years of service, or receive an additional month of pension credit, capped at 36 months, for each year of service.

When the county laws were ratified last month, several top prosecutors, including three of the senior litigators with the Westchester County District Attorney's Office, threatened to resign. Many were upset about the cap on accumulated vacation and sick time.

**Astorino has said their threat to resign was ultimately a human-resources issue and that people had to determine when was the best time for them to retire. "These huge sick-pay cash-outs were never intended to be 401(k)s or golden parachutes," he said at the time.**