



# Broke children's aid forced to cut jobs



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Provincial children's aid societies have begun to issue layoff notices and some are threatening bankruptcy as they struggle with a \$67 million shortfall.

In northern Ontario, Payukotayno James and Hudson Bay Family Services has sent layoff notices to its 120 management and front-line staff, said Marcelo Gomez-Wiuckstern, director of communications for the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies.

"If the agency doesn't receive the operating funds needed to pay the staff and deliver services to children and families, it will close the week of Dec. 16," he said.

Last week, the York Region Children's Aid Society terminated 18 positions, primarily managers and supervisors of front-line staff.

"We have done all we can to reduce our costs," said Patrick Lake, York's executive director. The agency, which has a \$5.5 million funding loss, has reduced a projected \$7.6 million deficit for this fiscal year to \$6.6 million through the cost-saving measures.

"This certainly has an impact on service."

Notices to eliminate 16 positions also might be issued by Kenora-Patricia Child and Family Services.

The association of children's aid societies warns agencies' legal obligations to protect children will suffer if the shortfall is not fixed.

Agencies will not be able to meet standards that require them to see children every month, and case workers will have less time to assess their safety and well-being.

The Payukotayno agency has a caseload of about 120 children in care. "This number doesn't include the

number of children (not in care) and their families who receive services," Gomez-Wiuckstern said.

His association represents 51 of Ontario's 53 children's aid societies, and 49 of them face a combined shortfall of \$67 million this year.

Provincial unions, including the Canadian Union of Public Employees, the Ontario Public Service Employees Union and the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers, will start a blue-ribbon campaign to support children in care.

"The blue ribbon indicates that the McGuinty government has failed children at risk," NDP Leader Andrea Horwath said Tuesday in the Legislature. "Will the premier commit that no children's aid society will cut services, lay off staff or file for bankruptcy?"

Children and Youth Services Minister Laurel Broten has said that over the last decade, financial support for the agencies has tripled and now stands at \$1.4 billion.

As Ontario battles a \$24.7 billion deficit, there will be no more money to prop the agencies up, Broten said. Instead, the ministry has set up a committee to find cost savings to help put the societies on a solid financial footing.

"Children of this province do not need another commission," Horwath said. "They need their children's aid societies to be there for them when they need them."

Potential agency bankruptcies prove the government is not managing the problem, said Sid Ryan, president of CUPE Ontario.

"Ontario is perilously close to the day when the doors at a children's aid society may be closed and locked because they've run out of money," he said.