



Double dipping public employees cost hundreds of millions

12:05 AM, Jun 13, 2008 | 0 comments



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Tampa, Florida - It is the agency that looks to protect the most vulnerable people in Florida. However, The Department of Children and Families is facing tough times. The legislature cut \$60 million from the DCF budget and the agency is losing 270 positions.

For 243 mostly high levels DCF employees the budget cutbacks and elimination of positions don't mean a thing because they have retired from the agency. However after they retired these 243 employees were hired back into their same job at the same salary.

The rehired or double dipping employees in this region include Operations Manager Margaret Fender, who retired with an \$89,559.60 salary. Fender was rehired at the same \$89,559.60 and then promoted

to a \$98,515.56 salary. Manager Michael Simmons, who retired at \$83,501.60, was rehired for the same amount. Program manager Deborah Spellman, who retired at \$70,142.28, was rehired for her same salary. All of these employees are members of what's called the Deferred Retirement Options Plan or DROP. DROP guarantees public employees a lump sum payment, plus retirement benefits five years after enrolling in the program.

New Port Richey State Senator, Mike Fasano says the DROP program was designed to weed out high paid public employees and then bring in new employees at lower salary. However Fasano says people are not doing that because they've found a loophole and are double dipping.

Fasano says the double dippers and the agencies that hire them are breaking a promise to the taxpayers. Fasano points out that the public employees were guaranteed a lump sum payment and retirement benefits as long as they retired after five years in the DROP program, but

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he says too many refuse to do it.

DCF Regional Director Nick Cox says he understands how some people might be upset by double dippers, but he says it is not agency policy instead it is a loophole created by the legislature. Cox also says he needs the experience of the people who have been rehired at DCF.

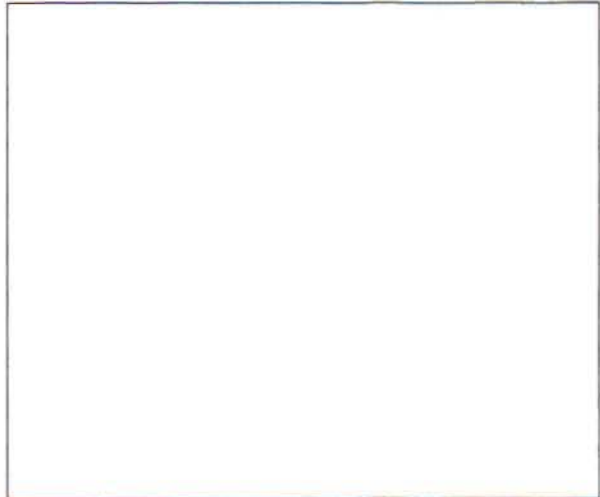
Fasano says he has heard that argument and doesn't buy it.

The double dipping has a huge price for taxpayers. The state estimates it costs more than \$300,000,000 each year to pay retirement benefits and salaries to double dippers.

Fasano tried to close the loophole in the past session of the legislature but the bill died. He says the only way it will stop is if taxpayers contact their lawmakers and tell them they don't like the practice.

Mike Deeson, Tampa Bay's 10 News

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