

L.A. Fiscal Troubles Will Force Staff Cuts
BILL BOYARSKY
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L.A. Fiscal Troubles Will Force Staff Cuts

Costs Increase as Revenues Drop; City Attorney, Parks and Recreation Targeted

By BILL BOYARSKY, Times City-County Bureau Chief

Unexpectedly higher costs and lower-than-expected revenue will force the city to begin the new year with unplanned layoffs, Los Angeles officials said Tuesday.

The news came in a midyear report by Mayor Tom Bradley to the City Council on the status of city revenues and spending for the current fiscal year.

Bradley and City Administrative Officer Keith Comrie said the layoffs will occur in the office of City Atty. Ira Reiner and in the Department of Recreation and Parks.

Anticipates 65 Layoffs

Reiner anticipates layoffs of 65 lawyers and assistants, out of a staff of 535, unless the City Council appropriates more money, Comrie said.

Comrie said Recreation and Parks will have to drop about 130 workers in January from a full-time payroll of 1,785 to meet a growing department deficit.

When the budget was approved earlier this year, Comrie said, Reiner had expected to live within a tight appropriation. Bradley had proposed an 18% reduction in the city attorney's budget but Reiner got the figure reduced by 25%. That, along with expected attrition, had been expected to avoid layoffs, Comrie said.

But Comrie said "attrition since that time has dropped off and it is now projected that even if attrition resumes at historical average, a deficit of \$955,000 will accrue by year's end."

"There is no way to avoid some layoffs," Bradley said.

The \$955,000 shortfall is in addition to a previously reported \$630,000 deficit in the department's budget, caused by higher-than-expected expenses in liability claims, litigation expenses and other services. Comrie has recommended that the earlier deficit be paid from city emergency funds.

Comrie said fiscal troubles in the Department of Recreation and Parks are due to lower-than-anticipated revenues from pools, the zoo, recreation centers, donations and the entrance fee at Griffith Park.

"If the current revenue trend continues, at least a \$1.5-million shortfall in departmental revenue collections is expected," Comrie said.

Hiring Freeze Proposed

In addition to recommending layoffs, Comrie proposed a hiring, pay and promotion freeze for the department.

In past years, such deficits would have easily met by a large reserve fund. But this year, Comrie said, the city's surplus will be about \$2 million—\$7 million less than expected when the fiscal year began.

Although General Fund revenues for the first five months of the fiscal year are 1% above expectation, Comrie predicted a second half decline because of poor economic conditions. He said sales and business taxes will be down, as will motor vehicle license fees.

Bradley said "continuing deterioration of the economy raises serious questions about revenue for the rest of the fiscal year and projects a dismal outlook for fiscal year 1982-83."

Reimer Tells of Possible Prosecution Cuts

JANET CLAYTON
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Reimer Tells of Possible Prosecution Cuts City Attorney Claims Office Needs \$1 Million to Meet Deficits

By JANET CLAYTON, Times Staff Writer

The departments prosecuting violations of rent control, consumer fraud and toxic waste laws will be "shut down" if the Los Angeles City Council does not appropriate another \$1 million to meet budget deficits, City Atty. Ira Reimer warned Wednesday.

Reimer, speaking to the council's Finance and Revenue Committee, said eliminating those sections would not be the only consequence if the city does not help his office.

Last month, Reimer eliminated 75% of the supervision in his office's criminal division in the hopes of curbing a \$855,000 deficit expected by the end of the fiscal year.

City financial experts had hoped that attention in the office would naturally take care of the deficit, but few attorneys have left the office in the last six months, Reimer said. Last week the city administrative

office reported that the slower rate of attrition would make it necessary to lay off 30 lawyers and 26 support staff. Reimer opposes any layoffs. But, at the request of committee chairman Marvin Braude, Reimer did list legal services that could be cut if funding ran out.

In addition to wiping out sections prosecuting consumer, environmental and housing fraud (those sections currently employ 14 attorneys), Reimer said, his office might be forced to eliminate enforcement of the Political Reform Act governing legal contributions to politicians instead leaving all such cases to the state attorney general's office, attend council and committee meetings only when called and restrict representation of the city in lawsuits.

Reimer also mentioned that the new stricter drunk-driving laws

will increase his office's caseload. Last year, the office handled 113,000 criminal cases, 40% of which were drunk driving.

Already, Municipal Court judges have asked for 10 additional lawyers to staff the courts for drunk-driving cases "and somehow we're going to have to find 10 lawyers," he said. He added that without additional funding, "there will be a significant decline in the number of cases the city attorney can prosecute."

Police Chief Daryl Gates, who also attended the meeting, said he is willing "to give up some of the money" of the \$1.6 million asked for by the Police Department to the city attorney if necessary. "Because I feel so strongly that it makes no sense for the Police Department to apprehend (a criminal) and then find the prosecution cannot be completed."

Firings in Reiner's Office Postponed
ERWIN BAKER
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Firings in Reiner's Office Postponed

By ERWIN BAKER, *Times* Staff Writer

Firing of 55 people, including 33 attorneys, in the Los Angeles city attorney's office was delayed for at least two weeks Friday after City Atty. Ira Reiner warned that the action would virtually "decimate" his criminal division.

The City Council's Finance and Revenue Committee ordered the postponement pending a review of the office's staffing requirements and priorities by offices of the city attorney, chief legislative analyst and city administrative officer.

Earlier, City Administrative Officer Keith B. Comrie suggested an appropriation of \$550,000 to partially cover a \$1.1-million deficit in Reiner's budget, which he said would require the immediate layoff of only 40 persons.

However, the committee accepted the recommendation of Councilman Zev Yaroslavsky that it consider replenishing the full \$1.1-million deficit, which Reiner said would prevent any layoffs because of expected attrition by the end of the year.

Reiner said the \$550,000 would mean 55 layoffs. However, he promised to wait for the committee's action before dismissing any personnel.

Also affected by the committee's action were 22 clerks, secretaries and other assistants who work directly with the attorneys on day-to-day legal matters.

Reiner told the committee last week that prosecution of violators of rent control, consumer fraud and toxic waste laws would be terminated if the council failed to appropriate the \$1.1 million to offset his office's deficit.

At that meeting, Police Chief Daryl F. Gates said he was willing to turn over part of the \$1.6 million he has asked for his department, because it made no sense to arrest a criminal without prospect of prosecution.

Yaroslavsky said Friday he did not think the offer, which would reduce funds available for recruit classes, was "necessarily credible."

While putting off a decision on the \$1.1 million or \$550,000 or some compromise figure, the committee approved \$630,000 for the city's attorney's liability section to offset payment claims and the cost of litigation.

\$600,000 Voted for Reiner's Office
DAVID JOHNSTON
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\$600,000 Voted for Reiner's Office

City Attorney Sought \$1.1 Million, Says He Will Cut Staff

By DAVID JOHNSTON, *Times Staff Writer*

City Atty. Ira Reiner won a recommendation from a City Council committee Wednesday for a \$600,000 supplement to his budget, but only after Councilman Marvin Braude sharply criticized Reiner's management.

The City Council is expected to vote Friday on whether to appropriate the funds from the city's rapidly dwindling reserve fund, which currently has only \$5 million.

Reiner asked the council's Finance and Revenue Committee for an extra \$1.1 million. He said the smaller appropriation will force elimination of 51 attorneys and 23 support staff through layoffs or attrition.

He said that because of the layoffs he will have great difficulty prosecuting criminal matters. "We will do it as well as we can, but that does not say it will be done competently," Reiner said.

Braude Criticism

Braude, the committee chairman, told Reiner that was a "gross indictment of your own management of your department."

Braude said Reiner should have begun laying off attorneys months ago rather than waiting well into the budget year.

Braude accused Reiner of "compounding the problem" of insufficient funds. "Your department and employees are suffering from the decision (to begin layoffs) not being made early," Braude said.

Reiner said that when he took office he knew he was underfunded and believed there would not be enough attrition by attorneys to make up the shortfall. But, he told reporters later, "prosecuting criminal cases requires a certain level of staffing."

Braude and Councilman Zev Yaroslavsky voted in support of the \$600,000 recommended by Keith Comrie, the city attorney. Councilwoman Peggy Stevenson, dissented, saying she favored appropriating \$1.1 million.

Reiner said all of the layoffs, which will begin in about three weeks, will affect prosecutors. He said he will transfer perhaps 30 experienced civil division lawyers to handle criminal cases.

Reiner said he will have to review his standards for filing cases, indicating that more marginal cases will go unprosecuted.

He said his priorities for cutting back in civil cases will include cutting back or eliminating enforcement of environmental, rent control and consumer protection laws. He said his office probably will eliminate enforcement of campaign finance laws and no longer will be an advocate for consumers in utility rate cases.

Comrie said that with the supplemental appropriation the city attorney's office will have sustained a 9% cut in its budget this year, compared to 18% for most departments.

Council OKs Funds for Reiner's Office
ERWIN BAKER
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Reverses Panel, Approves \$ 1.1-Million Request

Council OKs Funds for Reiner's Office

By ERWIN BAKER, *Times Staff Writer*

The Los Angeles City Council reversed the recommendation of its Finance and Revenue Committee on Friday and added \$1.1 million to City Atty. Ira Reiner's budget to avoid threatened layoffs in the criminal prosecution branch.

The 10-5 vote, which tapped the \$5-million reserve fund for the money, boosted the committee's recommended \$600,000 appropriation. It was a victory for Reiner, who has long feuded with the council.

Reiner warned the council that the lesser amount would result in the layoff of 35 to 40 attorneys—"every single one a prosecutor"—and about 20 others on the supporting staff.

The measure was sent to Mayor Tom Bradley for his signature or veto.

Meanwhile, City Controller James Kenneth Hahn called a press conference for Monday to discuss the city's fiscal troubles. A spokesman said latest information indicates a possible revenue shortfall this year "in the ballpark" of \$20 million.

Lobbying Effort

However, City Administrative Officer Keith E. Comrie, who prepares most of the budget for the mayor, said it is "too early to tell" if the \$20-million figure is accurate. Revenue figures "traditionally look

low at this time of the year, but usually pick up in the spring," he said.

Reiner's victory reflected an intensive 6-week lobbying effort in council offices and supporting testimony Friday by an impressive array of public officials and a widely respected private attorney.

A Reiner aide said the city attorney talked two hours "one on one" with each of the 15 council members.

Appearing with Reiner to argue his case before the council were Brian D. Crahan, presiding Municipal Court judge; Michael Tynan, supervising Traffic Court judge; Los Angeles County Public Defender Wilbur F. Littlefield, and Assistant Police Chief Wes Harvey, representing Chief Daryl F. Gates.

Majority Report

Also supporting the increased appropriation was Johnnie L. Cochran Jr., a former deputy city attorney and former assistant district attorney who, as a private attorney, has represented the parents of football star Ron Settles, who died in the Signal Hill jail.

The council overrode the majority report of Finance Committee Chairman Marvin Braude and member Zev Yaroslavsky and adopted Councilwoman Peggy

Stevenson's minority report.

Braude and Yaroslavsky charged, in effect, that Reiner had mismanaged his department by not firing more attorneys late last year, when it became apparent that expected attrition would not materialize; failing to shift civil branch attorneys to the criminal side to fill in the expected vacancies, and overspending his \$18.1-million budget.

"This has nothing to do with criminal prosecution," Braude declared. "But it raises the question whether the council will have the power to review the management of the city attorney's office."

Charter Responsibility

However, Reiner, firing back, said the issue involved prosecution of criminals, since the last hired would be the first fired and they were the prosecutors.

Their departure, he asserted, would "devastate our ability to prosecute crimes for which we have Charter responsibility."

Voting for the additional appropriation were Hal Bernson, Dave Cunningham, Robert C. Farrell, John Ferraro, Howard Finn, Joan Milke Flores, Gilbert W. Lindsay, Pat Russell, Arthur K. Snyder and Stevenson.

Opposing it were Braude, Ernani Bernardi, Joy Picus, Yaroslavsky and President Joel Wachs.

Reiner Wins \$1.5 Million More for Budget
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Reiner Wins \$1.5 Million More for Budget

The Los Angeles City Council Friday restored \$1.5 million to the 1982-83 budget of City Atty. Ira Reiner after he testified that the funds are essential in the continued prosecution of slumlords, rent control violators and consumer fraud.

The council's 10-5 action was unprecedented in that it amended the final budget resolution.

Never before, declared Finance and Revenue Committee Chairman Marvin Braude, who bitterly opposed the action, has the council waited until the final—previously perfunctory—stage of the budget process to take such an important step.

The \$1.5-billion spending plan now goes to Mayor Tom Bradley for review. Braude said he hoped the may-

or would veto the council's action on the Reiner matter.

Councilwoman Peggy Stevenson, who introduced the motion for the additional financing of Reiner's office, said that while it may be unprecedented, there was no reason why it shouldn't be done now . . . as long as there is proper reason . . .

By its action, the council not only restored the 2% cut in the city attorney's \$20.2-million budget approved last May 13, but added another 7%, which Reiner emphasized would only maintain the number of attorneys currently engaged in criminal and civil prosecutions.

The \$1.5 million was transferred from the reserve fund.

All other departments, except the Police Department, have been cut 2% in their appropriations, with the possibility that additional slashes may be ordered in July after the amount of state assistance is determined.

L.A. City Attorney Fights Budget Cuts
AUSTIN SCOTT
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L.A. City Attorney Fights Budget Cuts

By AUSTIN SCOTT, *Times Staff Writer*

Los Angeles City Atty. Ira Reiner escalated his campaign Thursday to stave off budget cuts in his office, saying they would mean an immediate "massive disruption in criminal prosecutions, and massive is not an overblown word."

His comments appeared aimed at Mayor Tom Bradley, who must decide by 5 p.m. today whether to sign or veto the budget approved by the City Council.

That budget gives Reiner's office \$1.5 million more than Bradley originally proposed, a 7% increase over last year, instead of the 2% cut that all other city departments except the police are being asked to take.

Lobbying Effort

Reiner won that extra \$1.5 million from the council a week ago with a heavy lobbying effort emphasizing how a 2% cut would wipe out his office's ability to handle many civil cases, which range from defense of suits against the city to drafting ordinances and advising the council.

Thursday, in a breakfast meeting with The Times city-county bureau, he focused for the first time on what would happen to the criminal section of his office.

In 1981, according to a Reiner spokesman, the criminal section handled 113,000 misdemeanor cases, more than 40% of them involving drunk driving. They also included thefts, narcotics cases, assault with a deadly weapon, burglaries and special cases like slumlord prosecutions, consumer fraud, and violations of environmental laws.

The 32 lawyers that Bradley's original budget would force Reiner to lay off would come, without exception, from the criminal division, Reiner said, because the city requires layoffs by seniority, and the criminal section is where attorneys have the least seniority.

"So what we will do is go into 32 courtrooms and pull 32 lawyers out . . ." he said. But because his office has to staff those criminal courtrooms, "we go into the civil division and we take lawyers that have career positions with land use and this and that, and we put them in a courtroom."

The best lawyers who don't want to go back to doing criminal trial work will leave for private industry, he said. "We'll get rid of our very best and keep our very worst." And the effect of that, he said, would last "five to 10 years," even if the budget cuts were restored the following fiscal year.