

Two years of economic instability means Clerk faces additional budget cuts

As the Legislature moves into its sixth week in session, the State's financial situation is ever present in their discussions and decision making process.

The Clerk's office is funded by fees, a requirement of the Florida Constitution. The current economic condition for Clerks statewide is bleak: All but foreclosure filing fees are down, and Clerks statewide are cutting their budgets an average of 13 percent .

As Clerk of the Circuit Court and County Comptroller for Sarasota County, I am in the final stages of identifying what must be cut from the Clerk's budget. In addition to positions that have already been eliminated, more cuts are necessary—cuts which could not only impact service levels and products offered, but will definitely include employee furloughs.

Cuts to date have been focused on reductions that would not impact service levels. Due to economic instability continuing into 2009, and projected for 2010, this office is faced with having to make decisions to implement our furlough policy, and consider other opportunities to decrease personnel-related expenses.

Efforts are being made to make the cuts, and results of the cuts, appear seamless to our customers, and to continue our commitment to providing the best service we can deliver— although given the financial situation, I'm not certain that will be possible.

These are tough times, harsher than some have ever seen in our local government, and through these challenges, we'll all have to work together. The Bar Association and its members are important partners with the Clerk's office. We appreciate the patience and support of the Southwest Florida Paralegal Association, Inc. during these changing times, and we will do everything we can to continue to deliver the service you are accustomed to receiving.

It is likely that we will use our website at www.SarasotaClerk.com to communicate changes, so be on the lookout under "What's New" on our homepage for current information about budget cuts and other service-related issues.