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Sequester pain will hit local Head Start program

By [Ken McCall](#), Staff Writer

The across-the-board federal budget cuts known as sequestration officially began March 1, but the pain is just beginning to be felt by federal agencies and offices in southwestern Ohio.

Of seven non-military federal agencies contacted for this story, all are planning for the budget cuts, but only three have taken or are planning for employees to take unpaid furlough days off work.

One local agency preparing to take furlough days and make other cuts is the Miami Valley Child Development Centers, Inc., which administers federal Head Start programs in Montgomery, Clark and Madison counties.

The organization, which has 2,809 children in various programs at 50 locations in the three counties, is planning for about a 5 percent budget cut, furlough days for all employees, cuts in medical insurance to some employees and enrolling about 150 fewer children in the fall.

Mary Burns, president and CEO of the centers, said she won't know the full impact until her budget plan is approved in early May.

"I can tell you this much," Hughes said, "we have been told that our cost-cutting, which right now is equal to 5 percent, which is over \$1 million, will take effect starting July 1."

Head Start, funded through the Department of Health and Human Services, is designed to promote school readiness to disadvantaged 4- and 5-year-olds through pre-school and kindergarten programs.

Hughes said her organization isn't going to do what Indiana did, and just "kick kids out" of programs.

“We have about 1,200 kids who go to kindergarten every year,” she said. “We’ll just enroll about 150 fewer kids in the fall.”

Cuts will also be felt at the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park, which operates five sites in the Dayton region and gets about 60,000 visitors a year.

The cuts will come to the Wright Cycle Company complex on South Williams Street in Dayton, and the Huffman Prairie Flying Field and interpretive center on Wright-Patterson Air Force Base. The other three park sites – the Aviation Center at Carillon Park, Hawthorn Hill and the Paul Lawrence Dunbar House – are operated by the private non-profit Dayton History, and are not affected by federal cutbacks.

The National Park Service does not have to do furloughs, said Dean Alexander, superintendent of the park, but said he will have to scale back other services to make up for a \$100,000 cut.

The park will soon shorten its hours by a half hour a day and will offer less programming, he said.

Cuts that will be made in summer seasonal hires will cause fewer program offerings, Alexander said. For example, fewer walking tours around the Wright-Dunbar neighborhood will be held.

“People who have been here before will probably notice that there are fewer opportunities,” Alexander said. “People who have never been here before will probably never notice the difference.”

The Federal Aviation Administration’s furlough of air traffic controllers, which began at some airports last Sunday, have caught the most national attention by causing flight delays at some major air hubs. On Wednesday, for example, the FAA said the furloughs had caused 863 flight delays across the country.

The political pressure got so great that the U.S. Senate responded late Thursday night by passing legislation that would grant the FAA budgeting flexibility to keep the traffic controllers on the job by shifting money from another of its accounts. The House approved the bill Friday.

Dayton International Airport, which has 15 air traffic controllers, didn’t see any “dramatic impacts” from the furloughs, according to Linda Hughes, the airport’s air service coordinator.

The Transportation Security Administration, which employs airport security agents, had already been given enough funding by Congress to escape furloughs.

The federal court system will incur cuts, but won’t have to take furloughs, nor will prosecutors and staff at the U.S. Attorney’s offices. Attorney General Eric Holder issued a memo on Wednesday saying that a hiring freeze and cuts to contractors will allow the Department of Justice to avoid furloughs of any employees.

The Federal Public Defenders Office, however, isn’t so lucky.

The 11 percent cuts to the budget were so tough that they prompted Federal Public Defender Steve Nolder, the head of the office in the Southern District of Ohio, to fire himself.

The public defenders offices in Columbus, Cincinnati and Dayton currently employ 36 lawyers and staff, who were all looking at 20 furlough days that had to be taken by the end of September, Nolder said.

Because of his resignation, the retirement of another lawyer, and some increased funding from the federal courts system, Nolder figures the furloughs are down to 13 or 14 days – still a lot of time off that has to be taken in the next five months.

“We have been able to function right now using bailing wire,” he said. “I don’t think we’ll be able to take as many cases as we have traditionally taken, because we are going to have people who aren’t present.”

Nolder also has cut the budget for training, travel and expert witnesses.

“Short term, I think we’re fine,” he said “We have good, quality group of people. And we’ll continue to do our best under these trying circumstances, but you worry about long term and how long this can continue, and can you continue to have quality people?”

Sequestration fallout

How federal sequestration is affecting some federal agencies in southwest Ohio:

Head Start (Miami Valley Child Development Centers, Inc.): Expecting a 5 percent federal funding cut resulting in furloughs, cuts to health benefits for some employees and a decrease in enrollment of about 150 children in the fall.

Federal Public Defenders of the Southern District of Ohio: 11 percent budget cut prompted the resignation of the head of the office, Steve Nolder. It will also require about 14 furlough days for the 36 employees in the district, cuts to travel and expert witnesses, and elimination of training.

Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park: No furloughs, but cuts to summer seasonal hires and programs offered at the Wright Cycle Company complex and the Huffman Prairie Flying Field. Daily hours will be shorted to 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

No furloughs for these agencies

Federal Aviation Administration: Congress passed Friday legislation that allows the agency to shift funds from other accounts and avoid layoffs and end furloughs. Other unspecified program to be cut.

Transportation Safety Administration: Congress had previously passed legislation to allow the TSA to avoid furloughs of its security screening employees.

Federal courts: The Southern District of Ohio United States District Court will be able to cut enough in other areas to keep its employees on the job until the end of federal fiscal year, September.

U.S. Attorneys Office: Attorney General Eric Holder said in a memo obtained by the Dayton Daily News that the Department of Justice will be able to avoid furloughs with a hiring freeze and cuts to contractors.