

Worthy: Cuts hamper crime fight

BY KATHLEEN GRAY • FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER • July 16, 2009

Low-priority crimes like breaking and entering might not be prosecuted and the conviction rates will continue to decline if the proposed budget for the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office is approved, Prosecutor Kym Worthy told commissioners this morning.

"We can't even cover our courtrooms anymore," Worthy said in vehemently disagreeing with the \$28-million general fund budget proposed for the prosecutor's office by Wayne County Executive Robert Ficano. "At some point, if the budget continues to be cut, we're going to have to start making decisions about what crimes we prosecute."

The county is facing a \$105-million deficit in its 2009-10 budget and has told department heads that 20% has to be cut from the overall budget. The 8% proposed cut to the prosecutor's office would translate into 54 fewer employees and \$6 million less than the prosecutor has asked for the upcoming fiscal year.

Worthy said she has cut her budget tremendously, going from 320 employees to 275 since taking office in 2004.

She plans on doing things like cutting out cleaning services for her office and exploring the possibility, with the courts and clerks office, to go to a four-day work week. She's even suggested to Gov. Jennifer Granholm that she not fill vacancies in the Wayne County courts for a short period of time to save money.

"I know times are tough, but I don't care about any other department. I care about mine," she said. "I'm not a prima donna, but we're losing cases now that we shouldn't because we don't have enough people."

Worthy got hearty support from commissioners during a budget hearing this morning.

"She needs all the help we can give her," said commissioner Keith Williams, D-Detroit. "Do we need to see another kid shot in Detroit?"

And commissioner Burton Leland, D-Detroit, added, "The No. 1 problem in the city is crime. If there's not a certainty of punishment here, this is the place where they come to do their business. You're the last department we should cut."

Budget hearings continue through July and the final fiscal plan will be voted on by the commission next month.

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