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**Budget woes forcing court cutbacks**

**Staff and Wire Report**

TALLAHASSEE -- Florida's 67 county clerks of court say \$90 million in budget cuts has forced them to eliminate 1,300 positions, furlough employees, close branch offices and reduce services.

The Florida Association of Court Clerks said Thursday it asked Supreme Court Chief Justice Peggy Quince to set priorities for the service reductions.

The budget cuts have resulted in insufficient courtroom staffing and delays in completing appellate records and foreclosure sales. Phone calls to clerks' offices also are going unanswered.

Volusia County Clerk of Court Diane Matousek said Thursday her office was forced to lay off 12 employees back in March and has implemented hiring and salary freezes out of necessity. She met with court administrators to reduce some courtroom functions.

"I'm working with the judges as best I can," she said. "I'm hoping the service to our customers isn't harmed, but there is a possibility there will be some delays. I'm hoping that doesn't happen."

Flagler County Clerk of Court Gail Wadsworth could not be reached for comment Thursday.

Statewide, clerks also have been training staffers to handle a broader range of duties, allowing lawyers to file documents electronically and urging the public to conduct business online.

-- Staff Writer Jay Stapleton contributed to this report.