

Malloy Official Says 2 Prisons To Close Regardless Of Concession Deal's Fate

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Layoff notices continued going out to state employees Wednesday even as their union representatives were trying to negotiate a revised, no-layoff deal with the Malloy administration.

Union negotiators are hoping to craft an agreement similar to the four-year, no-layoff deal that was made in exchange for two years of wage freezes and changes in pension and health care benefits.

Regardless of what happens with the negotiations, Gov. Dannel P. Malloy is moving ahead with the closures of the Bergin Correctional Institution in Mansfield on Aug. 5 and another prison in the fall.

"The prison closings are going forward," Malloy's senior adviser, Roy Occhiogrosso, told reporters Wednesday. "They were always going to go forward. That pace has been accelerated, in part, because the agreement was voted down. But that was always going to happen."

Later, Occhiogrosso added, "If there is an agreement, another prison will still close in addition to Bergin. In all likelihood, it will be Enfield. It might not happen by Oct. 1, but soon after."

Following the rejection of the original deal by rank-and-file union members, Malloy announced that the Enfield Correctional Institution would close by Oct. 1. Since then, everyone from the prison guards to state Sen. John Kissel to the local pizza shop employees has voiced concern about the potential closure in Enfield.

The prison guards at Bergin will be transferred to other facilities if a revised agreement is reached that includes no layoffs of unionized employees.

The number of actual layoff notices reached 1,851 state employees Wednesday morning, according to the Malloy administration. Those include 448 at the Department of Transportation, 282 at the Department of Developmental Services, 233 at the Department of Correction, 208 at the Department of Children and Families, 165 at the Department of Social Services, and 93 at the Department of Motor Vehicles. The totals are part of an aggregate, cumulative list that includes all of the previous notices.

Most, if not all, of those notices would be rescinded under a revised deal with Malloy, who retains the ability to continue layoffs of non-union managers. The notices tallied Wednesday include only those in the executive branch and none in higher education or in the judicial and legislative branches.

"I think there's a real sense of urgency on both sides to get this done," Occhiogrosso said. "There's no deadline, but both sides feel a real sense of urgency to get this done. ... This is not a wholesale negotiation. I'm not going to predict when it's going to happen."

Negotiators have one new issue to talk about that they didn't have weeks ago: Thousands of unionized employees in 13 of the 15 unions are scheduled to receive pay raises this month — about \$4 million worth in paychecks on Friday, July 29. The two sides are currently talking about the precise mechanism for stopping the raises in the future and potentially retrieving that money.

Union leaders returned to the table this week after the unions had voted to change their bylaws to make it easier to approve a revised, \$1.6 billion savings-and-concessions deal. The original agreement had been rejected under the union rules, and now it will be easier to approve a similar deal. Some state employees are angry that the rules were changed after the game had begun, and some are predicting that there will be even more "no" votes than under the original agreement.