

VBH BOT FYI Library Services

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Most of N. Suburban Library System staff face layoffs By Russell Lissau |
Daily Herald Staff
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Nearly the entire staff of the North Suburban Library System will be laid off at the end of the month because of long-standing fiscal problems, officials announced Wednesday.

Those who remain will investigate merging with other regional library organizations, many of which are in the same financial straits, NSLS Executive Director Sarah Long said.

Long will be among the 16 full-time employees who'll lose their jobs May 28.

"I've spent 20-something years here," she said. "You can't help but think, did any of it matter?"

Some van drivers and a few other employees will remain with the Wheeling-based organization, which serves about 650 libraries in Cook, Kane, Lake and McHenry counties. Two staffers who are about to lose their current jobs, Jan Hayes and Mary Witt, will serve as part-time co-directors, Long said.

Most of the organization's programs will be eliminated, too. An electronic newsletter, a job-posting service, a podcast and other features will end. So will Long's column for the Daily Herald.

The cuts are being made because the NSLS is running out of money. It's supposed to be funded through the state budget by the Illinois State Library and the Secretary of State's office, but the budgets for all nine regional library systems were reduced this year.

Additionally, payments have been late and millions of dollars are still owed for this fiscal year, which ends in June.

This weekend, NSLS officials will meet with a facilitator who specializes in mergers to talk about saving regional library services through consolidation. Other regional library groups are staging similar discussions, Long said.

Mergers might not actually do much good, Long said. The moves may only save some "rudimentary" services, she said.

Especially at risk is the organization's delivery service, which allows libraries to share materials. Funding for that enterprise may run out by mid-June, Long said.

Without program cuts and layoffs, the NSLS would be out of money in July, officials have said.