



# Legislation Forces Severe Cuts to Clerk Staff and Services

SHARON R. BOCK  
Clerk & Comptroller  
Palm Beach County

Longer lines, unprecedented filing backlogs and the elimination of several customer conveniences at Clerk & Comptroller offices throughout Palm Beach County are the anticipated result of state-mandated budget cuts and staff



**Sharon R. Bock**

reductions. Clerk Sharon Bock announced May 30 that 66 of her employees would need to be cut to meet a \$7.1 million, or 18 percent, reduction in the office's budget by July 1 as required by the passage of Senate Bills 2108 and 1718 during this year's legislative session. The bills, initiated by Florida judges and supported by the Florida Bar, Rep. Ellyn Bogdanoff and Sen. Ken Pruitt, slash \$46 million from Clerk budgets statewide and place Clerks in the legislative appropriations process, instead of directly funding clerk offices from fines, fees and court costs as mandated in the Florida Constitution.

"This legislation has destabilized Clerks' offices throughout the state, and unfortunately, the public will suffer the most," said Clerk & Comptroller Sharon Bock.

## Service Delays Expected

Although most state and local governments are experiencing a reduction in revenue, it accounts for an average staff decrease of .2%. In comparison, the 18% cut from Clerk budgets is unprecedented.

"...unfortunately, the public will suffer the most."

- Clerk Bock

With an annual loss of more than 210,000 work hours locally, service

level reductions are inevitable. Several practices focused on customer convenience will be eliminated. For example, the mid-county branch office in Royal Palm Beach will close to the public on June 30. Also being eliminated are front-counter windows designed to expedite transactions for civil and criminal attorneys and same-day payment for cash

bonds. The office will no longer have funding for overtime, which was used to clear out heavy backlogs such as those caused by the skyrocketing increase in foreclosure case filings. In fact, document processing time is expected to increase from 24-48 hours to several weeks as court case workloads continue to increase. To keep customers informed about what cases or documents are currently being processed, in the coming weeks the office will begin posting daily updates online and in each department.

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## LEGISLATION IMPACT

- \$7.1 million, or 18 percent, cut from Clerk budget (\$46 million statewide)
- 66 employees laid off (total of 101 positions cut in the past year)
- 210,000 work-hours lost
- Service level reductions are expected to include:
  - » Document processing delays
  - » Filing backlogs
  - » Longer lines
  - » Closing of Royal Palm Beach office
  - » Elimination of attorney windows, same-day payments for cash bonds and other conveniences

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### Proactive Measures

The Clerk’s office began strategically reducing staff and expenses more than a year ago when revenue significantly decreased due to the downturn in the real estate market. Operating expenses were cut by 33 percent, positions were eliminated and several departments or functions were consolidated for increased efficiency. With the recent layoffs and the positions previously eliminated, the office has cut 101 positions in the past year. As the chart below illustrates, while clerk staff has been cut by 13 percent this year alone, the number of new cases filed has increased by 12 percent since 2005.

### Clerk & Comptroller, Palm Beach County Case Volumes vs. Employees



### “Truly Disappointed”

The Clerk & Comptroller’s office has maintained an average 98 percent customer satisfaction rating for the past several years and earned the Governor’s Sterling Award in part because of its focus on customer service. It has also been twice named a finalist for the Best Places to Work award by the *South Florida Business Journal*.

“I am truly disappointed that everything we have worked so hard for—providing exceptional customer service and being a great local employer—is now in jeopardy because of the State Legislature,” said Clerk Bock.

The Clerk & Comptroller’s office, which currently employs more than 800 employees in offices throughout Palm Beach County, handles the “business arm” of the court system. Employees receive, file and retrieve court documents, process fees and traffic fines, and enter and maintain case information in the court’s computer system, making the information readily available to the public.