

Due to budget cuts looming ahead for the Columbia County Sheriff's Office, Sheriff Jeff Dickerson has announced a reduction of service hours at the walk-in window beginning in June.

"In an effort to help address a 17.67 percent reduction in general fund revenue that is dedicated our budget, we will close the front office four hours per week on Fridays, beginning Friday, June 5," Sheriff Dickerson said. Countywide, general fund revenue is down about 5 percent, but the Sheriff's Office share of that reduction is more than three times that amount.

"We represent the biggest expenditure of general fund dollars," Dickerson acknowledged, "If the budget has huge gaps in it, we are the place they are going to cut."

Additional staffing in the front office and a needed civil deputy position have been cut from the sheriff's original budget request this spring, making the current crush of civil papers and criminal reports that much harder to tackle, the sheriff said. With the addition of employee furloughs looming as a partial solution to county funding woes, the strain on the sheriff's front office make the move to reduced hours at the front window a necessary choice.

"So much doesn't get done in the hours we have now," Dickerson said. "In order to manage the increase in reports and civil papers as well as the potential loss of employee hours, we believe we must reduce the service at the window."

The Sheriff's new business hours (which will be posted online) will be 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Thursday and 8 a.m. to noon on Fridays. Jail Visitation hours in the afternoons on Friday will be handled through the Jail directly, as they are during holidays and the weekend.

"Reduction of hours of service is not where I want to go," Dickerson said. "It's where we're being lead, with little option. This may only be the beginning of some difficult choices in the future, but no matter what, we will continue to strive to deliver the best service possible."