Illinois Governor Pat Quinn (D) says he will proceed with a layoff plan that could affect nearly 2,600 state employees after concession negotiations with Council 31 of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) collapsed. Quinn’s senior staff held a series of negotiations with representatives of Council 31, hoping to gain to gain concessions help the state manage an unprecedented budget crisis. But Council 31 representatives refused to reopen the agreement with the state and accept wage cuts, furlough days, and other cost-cutting measures.

According to a statement released by the governor’s office, “unfortunately, AFSCME was not open to these proposals which would have saved thousands of state jobs and, instead, they made the choice to go forward with layoffs. We are hopeful that other unions will not choose this path. The union did recommend some additional cost-saving measures, which we appreciate and will consider. By being unwilling to reopen the contract, we are now forced to proceed with the layoffs.”

As part of a plan to push Illinois through its worsening budget crisis, Quinn says the state needs to lay off 2,552 employees. Of that total, 2,249 are represented by Council 31. Under “stage 1” of the state’s layoff plan, 509 Council 31-represented employees would lose their jobs on September 30. Quinn’s layoff plan, however, could be stalled by litigation filed by Council 31. The union sued in Johnson County circuit court seeking an injunction that would prevent the job losses until a series of grievances can be resolved.

Henry Bayer, executive director of Council 31, expressed frustration with the state’s posture during the negotiations. Bayer says that the governor’s negotiators demanded wage cuts of between 11 and 15 percent for all AFSCME-represented state employees over the next 18 months. Even with the wage cuts, the state was proposing layoffs of 1,000 state workers. Bayer says the state’s strategy is misguided and places an unfair burden on state employees, and that Quinn should focus on raising new revenues instead of cutting personnel and essential state services.

“AFSCME is strongly opposed to any layoffs,” Bayer states. “We made clear that the governor should rescind the layoffs he has already scheduled, and instead work to raise adequate revenue to support the vital services AFSCME members provide. If Pat Quinn chooses to lay off thousands of frontline state workers, he will decimate those services, including child protection, safe prisons, aid to the needy, care for the disabled, environmental protection, and much more.”