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City of Denver looking at 'substantial' layoffs amid budget deficit

Denver7 is listening to city workers and local labor leaders about their concerns with the proposed rule change and layoffs.

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Denver city leaders are preparing to make "substantial" layoffs in order to deal with a massive budget deficit.



By: Brandon Richard

Posted 8:31 PM, Jun 18, 2025 and last updated 5:26 PM, Jun 20, 2025

DENVER — Denver city leaders are preparing to make "substantial" layoffs in order to deal with a massive budget deficit.

In May, [Denver Mayor Mike Johnston announced](#) the city was projecting a \$50 million budget deficit this year and a \$200 million budget deficit next year. Johnston said his administration must consider layoffs to help the city balance next year's budget.

"We will have to look at layoffs," Johnston said. "We do not envision a scenario where it's possible to right-size this budget without that impact on personnel."

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said Karla



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The city has not officially announced any layoffs, but Wednesday’s acknowledgment is a significant development as the city looks for ways to balance next year’s budget.

City officials said it’s still too early to know how many workers will be laid off. It could depend on whether a [proposed personnel rule change is adopted](#).

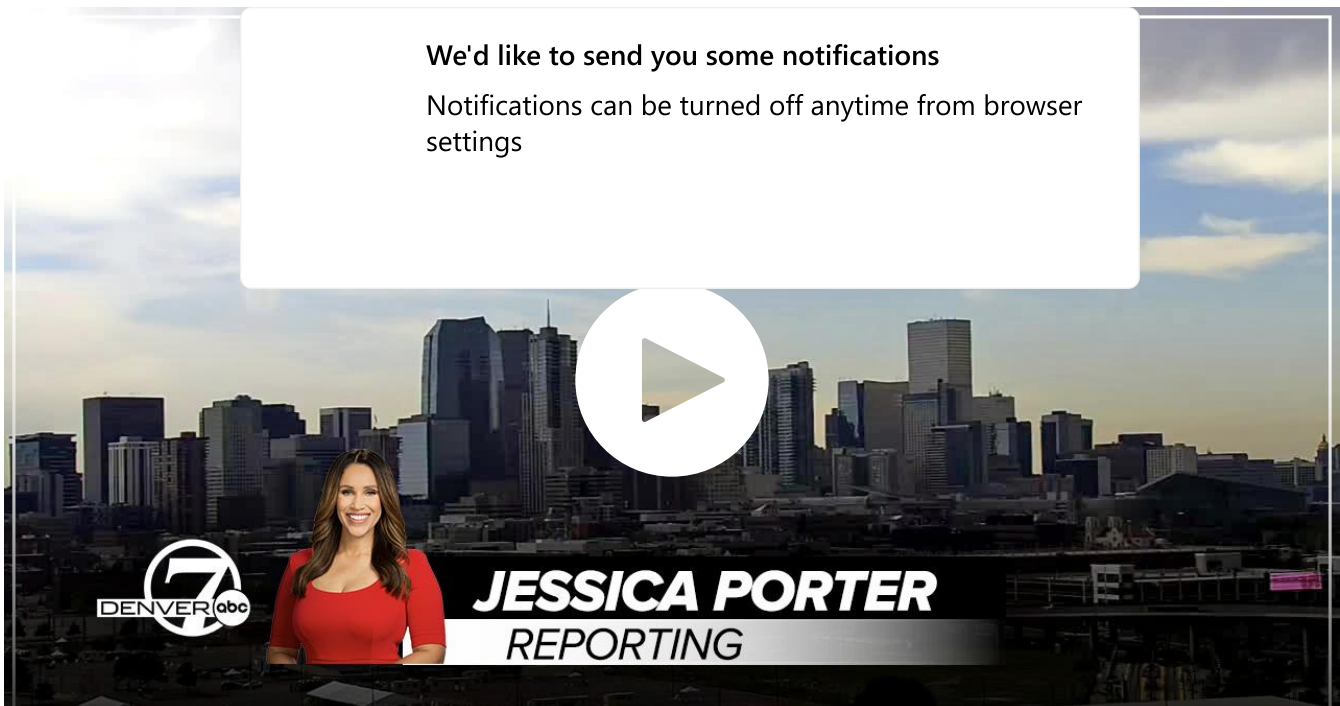
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The city wants to move away from a system that protects workers who have been employed by the city for a long time to a merit-based system.

Under the current rule, senior employees can “bump” less-tenured employees to avoid being laid off. Kathy Nesbitt, executive director of Denver’s Office of Human Resources, said the current rule causes significant delays in the layoff process.

“It also fails to ensure that we have the very best talent,” Nesbitt said.

The proposed new rule aims to evaluate employees based on four key criteria: performance ratings, skills, abilities, and length of service. Nesbitt said this approach will help the city retain the most talented and capable employees while meeting budget reduction goals. It would also make it easier to lay off senior employees.

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Denver Career Service Board meeting

Many long-time city employees told Denver7 they feel betrayed by the proposed rule change.

Audra Burgos, who has worked for the city for 37 years, was one of several city workers who spoke against the proposed rule change before Denver's Career Service Board, which is considering the proposal. About 800 other city workers listened to the meeting virtually.

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“City workers
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now, when times are tough, they're told their years of service and experience are left up to a subjective, messy, and arbitrary matrix.”

Calderón said a recent amendment to the proposal to include length of service as part of the evaluation criteria still won't provide the protections city workers deserve.

“This unprecedented and DOGE-like proposal doesn't just hurt workers, it opens the door to favoritism, political retaliation, and instability in our city departments,” Calderón said.

Union leaders don't like the proposed rule change either.

“It is subjective rather than objective,” said Mike Wallen, president of American Federation of State, County, Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Local 158. “We see this as a means of eliminating critics, eliminating career rivals, and, you know, just advancing people based on the boss's personal opinion of you.”

Wallen said they were also concerned about the rule change potentially being adopted before thousands of city employees can begin engaging in collective bargaining. Voters approved a measure in November 2024 that will allow an expanded group of city workers to join unions.

City officials maintain the rule change is being proposed to create a more flexible and strategic approach to layoffs.

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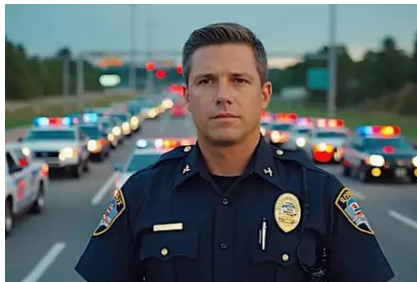
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