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State releases details of municipal aid cuts

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The state Department of Community Affairs on Tuesday released town-by-town details of the \$174 million in municipal aid cuts that are likely to put more pressure on property taxes in 2008.

The cuts represent the bulk of Gov. Jon S. Corzine's proposed \$190 million reduction in overall support for the state's towns and cities.

With less state aid, municipalities will have to try to make up for the losses by saving elsewhere -- potentially cutting services -- or increasing property taxes.

Most municipalities would see reductions that range from three-tenths of a percent of their total aid to a nearly 86 percent cut in Chesilhurst, which will cost the 2,000-person borough almost \$800,000 -- about \$400 per person.

Chesilhurst is just one example of a small town where the cuts will be deeply felt. Wrightstown in Burlington County will lose 81 percent of its state aid, about \$455,000 or \$614 per person in this 741-member community. Westville in Gloucester County, population 4,458, will lose 43 percent of its aid, about \$253,600 or about \$60 per person.

Corzine has targeted small municipalities, those with fewer than 10,000 people, for aid reductions to encourage town mergers and service sharing, which he has said would lead to more efficient government.

William Dressel Jr., executive director of the New Jersey State League of Municipalities, said the cuts targeting small towns are "arbitrary" and hit certain residents while letting their neighbors off relatively lightly.

"If you happen to live in a town with a population of less than 5,000 that is already sharing all the services that make sense locally, and if this proposal is adopted as is, then things will automatically get considerably tougher for you," Dressel said.

While many of the state's largest cities are losing large amounts of raw dollars -- Newark sees the biggest cut, \$6.7 million -- their percentage reductions are relatively small. The state's largest cities are all slated to lose between 4 percent and 7 percent of their aid.

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