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Jackson Health System puts layoffs on hold

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A spokesman said Jackson Health System Chief Executive Eneida Roldan would answer audit questions on Friday. MARICE COHN BAND / MIAMI HERALD FILE

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With cash scheduled to run out in May, Jackson Health System's chief executive announced Friday a moratorium on layoffs for 45 days to work with union leaders to find ways to get money from Washington and in new efficiencies.

At a news conference on Jackson grounds, Eneida Roldan said that 900 job cuts that she announced earlier this week would be delayed. Several hundred employees in the audience responded with wild applause.

“Every person clapping needs to come to the table,” Roldan said. “We need to become more efficient.” The crowd clapped again.

The news conference announced a new partnership between Jackson and Local 1991 of the Service Employees International Union, which represents 3,500 nurses, doctors and other healthcare professionals.

Last week, union president Martha Baker demanded a grand jury investigation of Jackson's “gross mismanagement.” On Friday, Baker shared a stage with Roldan to praise “a great partnership” in which she and Roldan will work together to find ways to save and obtain money.

Sometime in the next two weeks, Roldan and Baker will travel to Washington together to seek \$50 million in Medicaid money that SEIU analysts believe can be obtained by Jackson.

In other developments:

- Angel Medina, former bank executive and present vice chairman of the governing Public Health Trust, is being considered as the new chief financial officer. Roldan said an announcement might come later in the day. Medina did not respond to Miami Herald phone calls.
- Roldan and Public Health Trust Chairman John Copeland said they hadn't had time to review the draft of the 2009 audit, released late Thursday by Ernst & Young. They said they would reserve comments for later.

The 45-day moratorium begins March 1 and runs through mid-April. By contract, Jackson union employees must get 21 days notice before being terminated, meaning that any job cuts now will not come before early May.

Jackson's financial people have told The Herald that barring drastic changes, Jackson will be out of cash in May. A recent memo from Miami-Dade Mayor Carlos Alvarez said cash would be gone in June.

Roldan said she was searching for ways to get cash to bridge the gap until cost-saving initiatives could be found. “Let's hope we'll get that,” she said.

When a Herald reporter asked Baker if she were going to drop her demand for a grand jury investigation, the union president said, “We need to get things fixed here.” She said she wanted “as many eyes” as possible looking at the institution.

When another reporter asked if that meant she still wanted the investigation, the crowd of employees chanted, “Yes! Yes!” But Baker simply repeated that she wanted many examining Jackson's finances.