Gov. Edwin Edwards on Thursday issued a new executive order that continues a freeze on state employment but shifts the responsibility for monitoring to the department heads rather than the commissioner of administration.

The governor said a prior freeze order, issued Jan. 30, created a heavy volume of paperwork and consumed time that could better be spent on operation of state government.

That initial order provided that, with certain exceptions, no vacancy occurring in an agency could be filled without prior approval of the commissioner of administration.

Under the new order, the number of full-time equivalent positions in most state agencies may not exceed the total of those people paid for working at the close of business on Jan. 26 — except that the commissioner of administration will adjust the figure to take into account retirements under the early-retirement law passed by the Legislature.

The retirement law is supposed to reduce state employment by abolishing positions from which people retire and permitting departments to replace only one-third of the number of people who retire.

There are some exemptions to the hiring freeze.

Exempt are services provided by the office of corrections to comply with court orders, employees of the Department of Health and Human Resources necessary for the performance of direct patient care or compliance with court orders, and institutions of higher education only as necessary to comply with court orders.