



REBUILDING LIVES FOR A SAFE COMMUNITY: OUR RESPONSIBILITY

Facts and Recommendations for Action

WASHTENAW COUNTY CRIMINAL JUSTICE COLLABORATIVE COUNCIL

FACTS ABOUT THE JAIL

The Washtenaw County Jail was built in another time, for fewer inmates posing different sets of problems.

- Built in 1978 – for 215 inmates
- Today the jail holds an average of 356 inmates per day-well over its rated capacity of 332.
- In 2003, 64% of all inmates were being held on assaultive charges.
- From April to September of this year, the Jail was at or under capacity on just 15 days – and then, only because of the early release of inmates.
- Since January 2003, 563 prisoners have been released early from the jail due to overcrowding-278 of those were felons.

FACTS ABOUT DISTRICT COURT 14A

The site for District Court 14A does not meet court 'facility' or 'security' standards resulting in poor customer service, safety and security.

- Built in the 1950s, the retrofitted former seminary can no longer accommodate today's volume of court activity.
- Since 1985 the Court has seen a 31% increase in its caseload.
- Insufficient meeting space along narrow windowless hallways places the accused and their families in close proximity with victims and theirs – putting all at risk, including Court staff.
- Building structure and location require more human resources to secure transport of inmates, who must travel through public spaces from the Jail.

"Since 2003, we have released nearly 300 felons early from the Washtenaw County Jail because of chronic overcrowding. This is just the most visible indication of the threat we face in this community; it is a threat to public safety as much as a threat to the fair and just dispensation of laws."

- Judge Archie Brown

FACTS ABOUT ALTERNATIVE SENTENCING

The Washtenaw County community has long demonstrated high regard for the value of alternatives to putting people in jail for their offenses.

- Washtenaw County Community Corrections, a jail diversion program for non-violent offenders, has one of the highest utilization rates in the state.
- Washtenaw County has the lowest prison commitment rate in the state
- The county now pays other counties for the use of their Probation Residential Centers to present judges with more alternatives to jail time.

"In the 14A District Court, we have a facility that puts witnesses and families from opposing sides together in hallways and corridors. The situation is and has been degrading and dangerous. The proposed enhancements are long, long overdue,"

*- Lloyd Powell,
Washtenaw County
Public Defender*



The crowded main hallway at 14 A District Court creates comfort and safety risks for everyone who uses the court: victims, defendants, witnesses and court staff.

FACTS ABOUT A SYSTEM AT RISK

Chronic overcrowding at the Jail has a cascading effect that jeopardizes both safety and justice in Washtenaw County.

- Crowded jail conditions create safety risks for inmates, staff and the community at large.
- In 2004 alone, 56 security incidents have been reported at the 14A District Court.
- Overcrowding leaves police and judges limited in their options for dealing with offenders.
- Offenders know that failure to comply with probation will not result in jail and that early release can be expected.
- Alternative sentencing designed in part to prevent recidivism and support recovery is effective only if there are consequences associated with violating those sentences. Overcrowding means jail time as a consequence is not assured.
- Persons who are mentally ill cannot be properly assessed, nor properly treated because jail space and conditions limit appropriate programming and even placement.



Once a temporary holding cell, this room now serves as unacceptable yet necessary housing for prisoners who may be suicidal.

"As an officer of the law, I have a duty to protect this community, the inmates and also the men and women who work at the jail. It shouldn't be a choice, but it is. On a weekly, sometimes daily basis, the continuing overcrowding of the Jail puts my staff and this community at risk."

- Washtenaw County Sheriff Dan Minzey

SOLUTIONS RECOMMENDED BY THE CJCC

After nine months of study, reports from the National Institute of Corrections, the Ford School of Public Policy, and various task forces and sub-committees, the Criminal Justice Collaborative Council (CJCC) recommends the following set of solutions:

- Make the necessary improvements to the existing jail, making it safer for inmates, staff and visiting citizens.
- Increase jail capacity to 532 beds, phased in over 10 years
- Bring more resources to mental health diversion and treatment. Develop an Assessment Center and a local Probation Residential Center, reserving incarceration for violent and repeat offenders.
- Renovate existing building space adjacent to the Jail for a new 14 A District Court and Offices that will be secure while easily accessible to the public.
- Increase programming for inmates to help reduce recidivism and support positive reintegration into the community.

COSTS

- Capital Expense: \$ 48 million over twenty years
- Operating Costs, including staffing and new programming to help reduce recidivism.
- To address those costs over twenty years, it will require a millage increase of .75 mills.
- The cost to an average homeowner would be \$93 per year (home value of \$250,000 with taxable value of \$125,000)

For more information visit <http://cjcc.ewashtenaw.org> or call Scott Patton, CJCC Liaison, at 734.222.6765

SPECIAL ELECTION FOR THIS PUBLIC SAFETY MILLAGE FEBRUARY 22, 2005