

**JoCo Jail “Cap”  
Figures That Don’t Add Up  
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Out of 36 counties in Oregon, we are the only one to restrict the number of prisoners incarcerated at a number less than full capacity. We are filling only 120 beds of our 262-bed jail and releasing up to 75 felons each month. The Board of Commissioners, under direction of the Sheriff, proclaimed a ratio of 1 deputy to 5 inmates as an absolute. Using this logic, we could have saved ourselves a lot of money by not building the new jail.

In 2003, a recommendation presented to our “then” county commissioners proposed a limit on the number of inmates incarcerated in our jail. The Board of Commissioners adopted the recommendations made by the Sheriff, agreed upon by the District Attorney, and Legal Counsel in compliance with Oregon law. See Oregon Revised Statute 169.042 thru 046, and JOCO Court ORDER No. 2003-023.

In reviewing the minutes of that meeting, it became apparent the “stated” premise of the ratio of 1 deputy per 5 inmates was based on square footage of jail space in the antiquated jail located in the basement of the county court house. This same formula was applied to our new state-of-the-art jail without consideration of all the safety features included.

How does one determine the number of deputies required to operate our jail? A member of the National Sheriff Association Executive Board recently told me, “There is no magic formula because every jail is different.”

Based on my experience and carefully researching the issue I believe we need to re-examine the logic behind imposing such a limit and the need of our current “emergency release” program. Releasing criminals back into our community is certainly depressing – not to mention putting our citizens’ safety and well-being at risk. What deterrent remains to abate further criminal activity? Unfortunately, recent studies cited by the Multnomah County Sheriff’s Office Resource Analysis Unit show that it is evident an increase in crimes closely parallels the early release of inmates.

I cast absolutely no aspersions on the dedicated and professional correction deputies working hard to maintain safety in our community – but rather, identify a problem within the control of our current sheriff administration, and offer additional information for their reconsideration on this issue.

The safety of our inmates and deputies is extremely important. With this in mind, special features were included in the design of our modern jail. Our facility was compartmentalized with smaller rooms (called “pods”) separating the number of inmates into smaller, more manageable groups.

In addition, other security features such as cameras, electronically controlled doors and controlled movement of personnel are utilized.

With proper supervision, protocols, training, rehearsed emergency drills, and better use of available resources, crisis encounters are diminished, if not eliminated. If overcrowding ever becomes problematic within a common room in the facility, one could employ a simple time-sharing schedule.

In my opinion, the preceding conditions should determine the number of positions (posts) required to staff a jail. Further, multiply the number of positions by the shifts – add a standard formula to determine labor relief and you identify the number of personnel needed.

Understandably, the sheriff does not wish to see a reduction in the work force – nor should the residents of this county. The citizens of JOCO should demand more, not less, full-time professional deputies for obvious reasons. However, until we can afford them, there are other temporary resources available, but seemingly, the current sheriff's administration refuses to engage them.

Yamhill County (Oregon) is a classic example of what an efficient and professionally managed jail can do. Although this county is 55% smaller in area than Josephine, with a population of approximately 10,000 more citizens, and has a budget comparable to ours, Sheriff Crabtree has two fewer corrections deputies, yet continually fills his older, less efficient 250-bed jail to full capacity. Why can we not do better with our state-of-the-art facility?

I submit the following for review – Commissioners: (1) review the need for having a “cap” using the criteria prescribed by law, (2) since the county is self-insured, determine what impact this may have, if any, on our liability, and (3) require a realistic assessment of the situation, and (4) Adjust accordingly. In addition, the Sheriff's office should, (1) develop a strategy whereby Josephine County can manage their inmates similar to what the other 35 counties do – emulate the demonstrated successes throughout the state, (2) better utilize available resources, and (3) use prudent judgment relative to early release of inmates back into our community.

I believe we can resolve this “self-imposed” dilemma. Solutions are as plain as day – with proper management this issue can be turned around and our community will be safer for doing so. After all, of the 36 counties in Oregon, why are we the only one that cannot get it right – we certainly are not the only county concerned with “safety, or the only county dealing with reduced available dollars.”

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