

County struggling to keep youth suspects locked up

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A 15-year-old Merlin boy accused of threatening law enforcement is one of five youths currently being held in neighboring Douglas County in connection with crimes that occurred in Josephine County — and five is a lot, according to county Juvenile Justice Director Jim Goodwin.

"We're in pretty rough shape," he said.

The beds are rented, and the problem is that the need outweighs bed availability, meaning that right now, some youths suspected of committing serious crimes are being cited and released rather than booked into detention because there's no room for them.

After budget cuts forced the closure of the 14-bed detention center and 16-bed shelter at the Juvenile Justice Center in 2012, Josephine County began renting three youth beds in Jackson County. But since July, the county instead began contracting with Douglas County to house its juvenile detainees.

With the Jackson County beds, it was "use them or lose them," but in Douglas County, Josephine County purchased 1,095 "bed days," meaning if all three beds aren't used on any given day, Josephine County can bank the extra "bed day" and use them later, Goodwin said.

"This is saving us a lot of money," he said.

However, with five beds now in use, Josephine County is burning through its "bed days" and risks running out at some point.

Three of the youths in custody are facing Measure 11 charges — two are accused of participating in armed robberies in Grants Pass last month and one is charged with sex crimes, Goodwin said. Juvenile detainees charged with Measure 11 crimes are often held for months at a time. If the proposed city sales tax is approved in the November election, it would fund public safety services including the reopening of Josephine County's youth shelter and detention center.