

# Not enough room

## Overcrowding negates rehabilitation efforts, creates dangerous situation at county jail

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COSHOCTON — Kim Foughty has spent time in five Ohio jails in the past seven years. The problem with jails, she said, is they don't provide inmates with what they need.

"I've seen people sent to jail repeatedly who really need help, but they can't get it there," she said. In fact, Foughty could be talking about herself. Despite her incarcerations, she is still addicted to prescription drugs.

Foughty, and others like her, said help is needed during incarceration so they can become contributing members of society upon release. But when it comes to offering inmates those programs, the Coshocton County Justice Center is limited in what it can offer.

The jail no longer hosts Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous. But the crimes for which people most often end up in the jail are driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs, selling drugs and underage drinking. Also, there is no transition program for easing an inmate back into society.

Assault and domestic violence are the third and fourth most common reasons people go to jail. Counselors from First Step Family Violence Services and Six County Inc. venture into the jail when needed. In addition, there is the PRIME program for anger-control management. That's the extent of rehabilitation opportunities at the Coshocton jail.

"There's all sorts of programs we try to get in ... to give them a chance

### OVERCROWDING A crisis in our jails

This is the third in a series of weekly stories that will appear on Tuesdays. The series will examine the overcrowded and understaffed conditions of the Coshocton County Justice Center.

June 11: Judges and law-enforcement agencies are running out of room to put criminals in the jail, and it's a problem that affects more than just the sheriff's office.

June 18: Coshocton County judges change their sentencing practices due to the overcrowded jail.

**Today:** Cramped quarters lead to increased tensions and contribute to dangerous conditions for the inmates and staff.

**Next week:** In order for the jail to be run properly, inmates should be kept under constant surveillance. But that is impossible with an understaffed crew working the facility.

maybe to better themselves, that's the whole idea," said Lt. Starkey Lawrence, jail administrator.

But overcrowding has caused a lack of meeting space which limits rehabilitation efforts. When programs are offered, many inmates apply. Unfortunately, all programs limit the number of people who can attend. Therefore, corrections personnel try to choose those whom they

feel are at greatest risk for repeating offenses.

And the lack of space leads to other problems as well.

### Lack of sufficient space

According to the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction, jails should provide all prisoners with "sufficient" space for reasonable and necessary movement and seating for each prisoner in holding areas, cells, dormitories, day-rooms and/or eating areas.

There are specific guidelines depending on the type of cell, but, in general, sufficient means 50-square-foot per inmate, according to state guidelines.

The first state standards were issued in 1975, two years after the Coshocton County Justice Center was built. The jail offers less than half that amount of space: There are only 44-square feet in a two-person cell, 88-square feet in a four-person cell.

There's no room for the prisoners and attorneys to have meetings — that room has been turned into another holding room. Now, prisoner-attorney meetings take place in either the laundry room or the recreation room, if it's not in use. Those two rooms are also where mental health evaluations and clergy visits take place.

There is no area for them to go outside, so inmates —whether they are there for one night or six months

# Overcrowding

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— don't get fresh air. Inside the cells the lighting is dim. There are some places where inmates can't read because the lighting is so bad.

"(The jail) is built this way, you can't change it," Lawrence said, pointing to the panel lights embedded in the ceiling.

Inmates who have to be closely supervised are put in the isolated padded cell, a 7-foot by 10-foot room with gray wrestling matson the walls and door, a dim light overhead, and a hole in the ground for the inmate to use when he or she has to use the bathroom.

And the more suicidal inmates are put into the cell naked or wearing just undergarments to keep them from hurting themselves. And sometimes, according to Lawrence, an inmate will spend months in that cell.

In cell block I, six inmates take turns eating dinner at a table designed for three people.

"Each person needs a place to sit for their meals," Lawrence said. That doesn't happen in any of the cell blocks. The idea behind the square footage guidelines is that everybody has that little circle of space, Lawrence said. He makes a sweeping motion toward an 88-square-foot cell. "If we confine four people in this little area here, for a week or two at a time, they're not going to get along. I don't think you, your wife and your kids could survive in there for long. That's why there are regulations."

Lawrence points out that a lot of people in the community think people in jail don't need space, because they are in jail to be punished.

"But if they're in jail, we have to run the jail," he said. "The more problems you have in a jail, the harder it is to run the jail, the harder it is on the staff, the harder it is on the property."

## Problems

Scott Blough, administrator for the Bureau of Adult Detention, an arm of the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction, said there are other factors to consider when looking at the space issue.

"We must remember that around 50 percent of the people in jail are not convicted, but are being housed pending a trial or arraignment," he said. "This boils down to effective jail operations more than providing inmates with space. Effective jail operations improve the rehabilitation component of the jail."

Common Pleas Court Judge Richard Evans said it may be difficult to run programs effectively when there's no place to put the program. "Those (programs) could be extremely helpful, but you have to have a place to hold them.

"A situation where you are so uncomfortable and so angry ... doesn't allow you the chance to think about what led to you being in this situation and how to change that."

Lawrence agrees and says lack of space becomes dangerous.

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— Lt. Starkey Lawrence,  
jail administrator

"If you come in here for just a few days it's not that bad, but if you're in here for months and months it is. People get on each other's nerves."

When that happens fights erupt, causing understaffed correctional officers to risk their own lives to control the situation.

Sheriff Tim Rogers said the department takes the safety of inmates and staff very seriously. He calls it the department's most serious charge.

## Safety for all

That's a charge that is harder and harder to meet. The lack of jail space means that Lawrence can't always maintain the separation he'd like to between some prisoners.

For instance, driving under the influence, DUI, is a misdemeanor, a less serious type of crime. Selling drugs is a felony, the most serious category of crime. Rape is also a felony. But, on the men's side, inmates are no longer classified by levels of crime. Rather, they are classified by violent, non-violent and sex offenders. On the female side, it's easier to classify: If the inmate is female, she goes to cell block H whatever her crime.

The classification issues lead to problems and fights, Lawrence said.

"We have to be careful because if a 19-year-old feller comes in for drinking a beer underage, he's not supposed to be housed with someone who's in here for rape, murder or a violent crime. You just don't do that. That's the trouble we're running into right now," he said.

According to Lawrence, there are two or three fights a week on average. The staff has been lucky so far. No one has been seriously hurt — one officer hurt his back, and there's been some minor eye injuries.

"You're lucky if every morning you are OK when you end your shift," Lawrence said.

It's a problem only made worse by not having enough corrections officers to safely run the jail.