

Temporary booking restrictions were recently required at the Weld County Jail because of a crisis caused by inmate overcrowding. Although booking restrictions have now been lifted after being in place six days, they may be necessary if crisis overcrowding occurs in the future.

Restricting bookings was a very difficult decision implemented only as a last resort. Community safety is my number one priority and a lot of thought and attention was given to make sure that public safety was not compromised.

The crisis occurred when the number of inmates at the Weld County Jail ballooned to 587 when the Jail has only 405 beds. That happened even after 113 inmates had already been moved to other counties throughout the state. Overcrowding this severe created an unsafe environment and was dangerous to staff, visitors and inmates alike. It also left the county, and ultimately taxpayers, exposed to civil litigation and potential federal court oversight.

All other contingencies to manage jail crowding before bookings were restricted had been exhausted. Some examples of contingencies include:

- 1) Sending all locally sentenced inmates waiting to be accepted by the Colorado Department of Corrections to other county jails.
- 2) Sending all inmates sentenced to the Weld Jail who were not trusty prisoners to other county jails.
- 3) Moving all sentenced offenders approved by the court to electronic home monitoring.

Other strategies have been enacted during the years before this crisis hit to minimize jail crowding.

Some of these strategies include:

- 1) An Initial Appearance Magistrate that makes the court available 7 days a week and allows expedited review of warrantless arrests and the setting of bail within hours of an arrest.
- 2) Jail Alternative Sentencing programs that offer the court sentencing options other than jail that include a staff-secured residential work release center and electronic home monitoring.
- 3) A Pre-Trial Supervision Program that allows low-risk offenders to be released but supervised in the community to insure they comply with conditions of release set by the court.
- 4) A Jail Crowding Contingency Plan enacted with the court that allows the sentencing court to determine if an offender may be moved from the jail to electronic home monitoring when crowding reaches certain benchmarks. The offender is returned to jail if

space becomes available.

Booking restrictions had no effect on criminal cases that had been reviewed by a judge because arrests by an arrest warrant for state offenses continued to be accepted.

However, arrests without arrest warrants were limited to the following criteria:

- 1) Persons not charged with a crime but a danger to themselves or others because of alcohol, drugs or mental condition were diverted to a licensed treatment center or an emergency medical facility.
- 2) Department of Corrections parolees committing violations of parole conditions but without new criminal offenses were not accepted.
- 3) Municipal ordinance violations and municipal court warrants were not accepted.
- 4) Petty offenses were not accepted.
- 5) Misdemeanor arrests without an arrest warrant were not accepted unless the offense was a sex offense, crime against a child, violation of restraint order or an offense that mandates an arrest such as an act of domestic violence.
- 6) Certain classes of non-violent felony offenses were not accepted. However, exceptions were made to the restrictions when justified by exceptional circumstances.

A new jail wing is under construction and is expected to open in February 2008. This will add 374 more beds when fully operational and will help alleviate the crisis in the short run. The challenge we all face is how to operate a safe and secure facility until the additional space is available. It is important that despite a future county jail of nearly 800 beds, jail capacity be carefully managed by all components in the local criminal justice system because it is not only a community safety issue but one that includes community resources.

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