



Albemarle-Charlottesville Regional Jail Must Deal with Overcrowding

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Overcrowding is a familiar issue at the Albemarle-Charlottesville Regional Jail.

So what do you do when you have too many inmates, and nowhere to put them? Jail and community leaders think they have the answer, and the best part is - it won't cost you a dime.

The simple answer to solve overcrowding is either build a bigger jail, or find a way to keep people out of it. Adding onto the existing jail in Albemarle County could cost more than \$25 million.

So in a time of constrained budgets, the choice is clear.

Administrators at the Albemarle-Charlottesville Regional Jail noticed something interesting while trying to solve a chronic overcrowding problem last year.

"Once you look at the list, everyone's like, 'Oh I know that guy!' Like, 'I've arrested that guy numerous times in my career,'" said Lt. Col. Martin Kumer, regional jail deputy superintendent.

Of all of the people who spend time behind bars throughout the year, a group of just 30 people were coming back again and again, accounting for 5 percent of jail bed days.

"If they're coming in 30, 40 times per year and we can cut that in half, they only come in 20 times per year, then everybody wins," Kumer said.

That's the new goal: rather than adding space to house more inmates, the jail is looking for ways to keep people out.

"There are a variety of different techniques and innovations that we can employ," said Charlottesville Commonwealth's Attorney Dave Chapman.

One innovation on the table targets low-level offenders. It would keep those criminals out from behind bars by implementing a day reporting center to monitor them.

"And then let the courts readdress the issue; if they still need to come to jail they can get a reduced jail sentence or they can be released perhaps," Kumer said.

Leaders in law enforcement, courts and other areas are still discussing the details. Thanks to a federal grant, the program won't cost anything for taxpayers, and it could reduce overcrowding by another 10 percent.

"If we keep on track I think we can certainly avoid another expansion," Kumer said.

The day reporting center concept has been floating around in discussions for some time, but will formally come before the Community Criminal Justice Board when it meets Monday.

It has been shown to work in Chesterfield County. But there are still some of the questions on the minds of those in Charlottesville: who would run the program, where would it be housed, and who would be eligible?