

Oakland moves to reduce jail roll

By Suzie Rollins Singer
staff writer

Oakland County has until Aug. 22 to reduce the county jail's population to 450 inmates, and law officials and commissioners are moving rapidly in that direction.

"The week ending July 17, the jail population was only 34 over the limit," said Debbie Culver of the County Executive's justice program division. "We're still over, but we're moving in the right direction."

Under a U.S. District Court consent judgment, the county is mandated to expedite inmates out of the jail.

For more than a year, a 19-member subcommittee — which includes members of the County Board of Commissioners and an array of county and law enforcement officials — has been meeting bimonthly for more than a year to determine how to reduce the jail population. It is looking for alternatives to building a new facility.

According to a report, the jail has

been overcrowded since it opened in 1873. Inmate population has increased from 400 in 1973 to 647 in 1980.

- IN ORDER** to trim the population:
- Local police officers have been told to issue appearance tickets to misdemeanor offenders instead of arresting them and hauling them to jail.
 - Friend of the Court procedures have been expedited.
 - Completed inmates are being shipped to state institutions twice a week rather than once a week.
 - Mental patients are being screened and sent to state hospitals more quickly rather than biding time in the county jail.
 - The population at the trusty camp is near capacity (50).
 - Community residential facilities as alternatives to incarceration are being utilized.

OAKLAND UNDERSHERIFF Harry Jones said many delays still are caused by courts. He pointed to postponements

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County Executive's justice program division

and excessive paper work going undone.

"Anything with the court is out of our hands. The prosecutor's office is having problems with the courts too," he said.

Getting the trusty camp population up to capacity was quite an achievement for the county, he said.

In order to be eligible, Jones explained, an inmate must be sentenced

to the county, have no charges against him other than through friend of the court or traffic, have a good performance in jail, be a low-escape risk, have few disciplinary problems and no health problems.

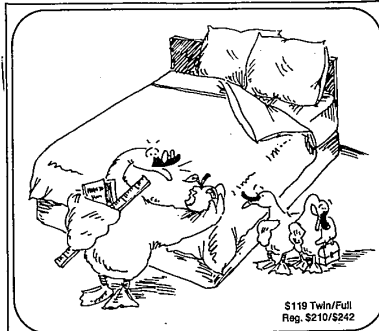
"We look at each person separately and evaluate them," Jones said of all the men who are eventually sent to the camp.

"About 160 men are eligible for the trusty camp daily," he added.

OTHER REQUIREMENTS of the decree include hiring more persons to work inside the jail.

So far, 22 out of 25 detention officer positions have been filled, and five out of the required eight clerk positions have been filled. One of the required inmate worker positions has been filled, and Jones is certain the remaining positions will be filled by Aug. 22.

The jail study committee will hold one more meeting before Aug. 22, to make sure the county is in full compliance with the decree.



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