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AR jail trying to ease overcrowding problems

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WALNUT RIDGE, AR (KAIT) – Law enforcement in one county is trying to do their best to keep violent offenders behind bars while trying to cut down on overcrowding inside their jail. Even though jails stay full, arrests still have to be made. Now one sheriff tells us they're trying something new.



Lawrence County Sheriff Jody Dotson said they've looked at all sorts of ways to cut down on their jail cell population. Now they're using some alternative methods of making space.



"We've had major problems with overpopulation," said Dotson.

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The Lawrence County Jail has a maximum capacity of 42 people, but they usually house about sixty.

"All felony violations are going to get you an automatic ride to jail," said Dotson.

Dotson said he knew they had to make some changes. He said he has been working with the county prosecutor, and the district and circuit judges to keep people out of jail.

"Some of these little bitty things, lets make the bonds more affordable so they can bond out and come to court and take care of their business," said Dotson.

Lowering bonds is not for all crimes. Dotson said the crimes he is talking about include hot checks, DWI's and other misdemeanors.

"If two guys get into a fight with each other, instead of setting a really high bond on both of them where they have to sit in jail for a month waiting to go to court, the courts have agreed to make the bonds more affordable," said Dotson.

Now those bonds run anywhere from \$1,500 to \$5,000, where they used to be \$10,000 and up.

"I've just had to go to them and say, 'look, I need some help'," said Dotson.

So far it is working. For the first time in more than a year they have four empty beds inside the jail.

"We can't afford to get shut down but these guys out here who are cooking meth and hurting children and violence and everything else, we've got to keep these guys in jail," said Dotson.

For those who suffer from addictions, the court is proving help through drug court to get them into a rehab facility instead of a jail cell. Dotson said he is also working with Lawrence County Judge Dale Freeman on a work program for prisoners. They are still working on the paperwork that would allow them to take some inmates out and do cleanup along the side of the road and work off some of their time.

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