

Adams County hires consultant to help with jail overcrowding

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BRIGHTON — The hiring this week of a consultant with a background in criminal-justice management is the first step toward solving conditions at the Adams County Jail, according to officials.

Michael R. Jones and the nonprofit Institute for Justice Planning will work with local police chiefs and mayors as well as state and county executives to help develop a committee to oversee criminal-justice activity in Adams County, officials said.

The first task of the as-yet- unformed Criminal Justice Coordinating Committee is to tackle jail overcrowding, which led to a cap on the number of municipal inmates to be housed at the facility.

"It's a pretty tall order we are taking on," said Adams County Commissioner Erik Hansen. "We want to control the jail population and keep those who should be in jail in jail, while managing our finances and the public safety."

The cap — which began Jan. 1 — is set at 30 and is spread among nine municipalities in Adams County based on each city's population. Thornton, the largest city, gets eight beds; Westminster, five; Aurora and Commerce City, four apiece; Northglenn and Brighton, three each; while Federal Heights, Arvada and Bennett get one each.

The county will charge each city \$45 a day for each inmate over the cap.

Sheriff Doug Darr said the caps are needed to head off a \$7 million-to-\$9 million budget shortfall. Because of hiring freezes, the jail is operating with fewer staffers, which is leading to potentially dangerous situations, Darr has said.

The cities, however, are saying the county is forcing municipal judges to let low-risk offenders walk without jail time. The cities also complain that residents' property taxes have paid for jail operations that should be available to them.

Jones will be paid \$158 per hour, but his pay is not to exceed \$21,962. Jones is the criminal-justice planning manager for Jefferson County and provides information and data about jail use, criminal-case processing, new legislation and local policies, officials said.

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