

Lancaster Online

County Adopts New Policy On Bail Bonds

New Regulations Create Tougher Standards for Bondsmen

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It's now in writing: There are no get-out-of-jail-free cards in Lancaster County.

A policy is now in place to regulate how agents write bail for county prisoners.

Previously, the county had no set standards for bondsmen who essentially front prisoners money to get out of jail until trial.

Too often, officials say, prisoners free on bail wouldn't show up for court – and bondsmen often were let off the hook financially.

"That allowed [bondsmen] as many debts as they wanted without ramification," said District Attorney Craig Stedman, an advocate for the new policy. "You could just keep writing bonds whether it was a good risk or not."

The new policy, signed last month by County President Judge Joseph Madenspacher, goes into effect on Aug. 22.

It requires bondsmen practicing here to have a \$25,000 account with the county. Any outstanding debt regarding fugitive prisoners out on bail will be taken from that account, according to Nicole Decker, assistant county solicitor who drafted the policy.

The policy also sets a ceiling for outstanding debts, and requires local bondsmen to have an office here.

County officials hope the new standards will prompt bondsmen to be more choosy when accepting I.O.U.'s from inmates.

"There really was no comeuppance," Stedman said. "If you're going to get people out on bonds, they should be assessing the risk."

"We were one of the only counties who had no guidelines."

As of Tuesday, officials said, the only bondsmen to submit deposits were James Fabie and Steve Schiding of Lancaster Bail Bonds.

Fabie said compliance with the policy will be no problem.

"It won't change anything for me," Fabie said Tuesday while walking to county court to post a bond.

Fabie claimed, and county officials agree, that he actively pursues clients who fail to show up for court.

"I'm putting my life on the line to bring people to justice, going to Oklahoma for people," Fabie said.

He often employs a bounty hunter to help find fleeing clients and bring them back here.

"Some bondsmen are extremely aggressive in pursuing," Stedman acknowledged.

But not all bondsmen are so concerned with finding their clients, Decker said.

"Everyone will now play by the same rules," she said.

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