

Early Releases Hurt the Bail Bonds Business



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Bail bondsmen say their business is down 50 to 70 percent from this time last year. That's because a portion of the inmates booked into the Fresno County jail are being released without bail, due to overcrowding.

Early releases at the Fresno County jail have been a point of contention for the past year.

Sheriff Margaret Mims closed down about half the jail after correctional officers were laid off to balance the budget.

"I think that early releases send a message to the criminal element in our city and our county that it's ok to commit certain crimes because you're just not going to be held accountable," said Barry Pearlstein, owner of Lucky Bail Bonds

Pearlstein says he's lost more than four-million-dollars in business because of the early releases. He makes his money when people bail out of jail.

Say for instance that a person's bail is set at ten-thousand-dollars. The person will pay the bail bondsman a fee of ten percent or a thousand dollars to cover the bail. If the person doesn't show up in court, the bail bondsman is responsible for the remaining nine thousand dollars.

With the closure of floors in the jail, prisoners aren't having to post bail to get out.

"If they fit the criteria, if it's not a violent one, they're automatically released. These people are being released sometimes faster than police can get back in their vehicles.

Sheriff Margaret Mims has said that only non-violent inmates are being released.

"I keep murderers, rapists, robbers, and home invasion robbers," Mims told CBS47 earlier this month.

Pearlstein says early releases have been an issue throughout the entire state, but not the magnitude seen in Fresno County.

There is not much hope on the horizon to reopen floors at the jail.

The Sheriff's department is looking at laying off nearly 70 deputies to balance the budget this year. There is no money in the budget to hire back correctional officers.