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Get Out Of Jail Free

Kansas judges have said own recognizance bonds fight jail overcrowding issues and save taxpayers money. But others argue OR bonds can harm public safety.

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Kansas state lawmakers are debating a bill that would limit the number of jail inmates released without a bond.

The measure aims to decrease the number of recognizance bonds a judge can issue. The defendant signs a court record promising to appear for the next court date, or get out of jail for free.

Kansas judges have said own recognizance bonds fight jail overcrowding issues and save taxpayers money. But others argue OR bonds can harm public safety.

Chris Fisher, bail bondsman, said many people are set free after they have been arrested for a serious crime.

“We have been seeing a trend on high level felonies being let out of the jail,” Fisher said. “It has to be solely for jail overcrowding.”

Court records show Sedgwick County District Judges granted more than 3,500 bonds over the last three years to people arrested for felony crimes.

But administrative Judge James Fleetwood argued only a small percentage of defendants let out on OR bonds fail to appear in court.

“These people aren't just put on OR bonds and left to run, they are put into treatment programs,” Judge Fleetwood said.

A new initiative in 2006 ordered hundreds of Sedgwick County inmates to wear electronic monitoring devices, or report daily. The policy change dropped the number of inmates being held behind bars, and saved the county from building a new jail.

“It's statistically proven the quicker we can get them out of jail, the less chance of reoccurrence of criminal activity will take place,” Fleetwood said.

But bail bonding agents said if defendants have a history of not showing up for court, or are arrested on serious felony crimes, they should be forced to post bond.

“There has to be that accountability to insure justice especially for these victims of these crimes,” Fisher said.