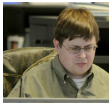


Jefferson County Sheriff Mike Hale says jail won't release inmates due to overcrowding

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By Jeremy Gray -- The Birmingham News



Jefferson County Sheriff Mike Hale

JEFFERSON COUNTY, Alabama --- Jefferson County Sheriff Mike Hale today sought to assure the public that no inmates will be released from the county jail due to overcrowding.

In a news release, the sheriff's office said it has received many calls in the last two days from citizens concerned about inmates being released after a comment by a Jefferson County Commission President David Carrington.

Carrington said this week that the county's funding crisis could lead to the release of between 300-500 prisoners from the county jail in Birmingham.

"We can't be in contempt of court and we don't have money to open the Bessemer jail," Carrington said this week. "And if you don't have money to open the jail and if you have too many prisoners I'm not so sure what the alternative is. I think it's a huge public safety issue."

Carrington said the commission has to be "compliant with federal law and if that requires letting prisoners go or suggesting that prisoners are let go in order for that jail to service the number of prisoners we have that will have to be the situation."

Hale said he opposes releasing inmates.

"The mission statement of the Sheriff's Office is to "Keep Neighborhoods and Communities Safe." Any such consideration of releasing inmates completely runs counter to that mission statement," the news release stated.

The statement continues: "While Sheriff Hale believes the answer lies in a funding fix by our State Legislature he wants to set the record straight that he in no way ever has nor would he ever support the release of inmates into our communities and will fight that every step of the way. Releasing inmates that should be kept locked up is simply not a solution."

There are 1,176 inmates in the county jail in Birmingham, according to the jail log. The U.S. Department of Justice says there's enough space for 1,035 inmates. The county jail in Bessemer was closed September 2009, a move Hale made when \$10 million was cut from his then \$61 million budget.

Birmingham News staff writer Barnett Wright contributed to this report.