

Larimer jail reconfigured for rising female inmate population

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Parts of Larimer County's jail have been reconfigured to make room for a growing population of female inmates, and the changes have forced administrators to make staff schedule changes.

An area that housed males with special medical needs was converted to house female inmates. Male inmates in that section of the jail were either moved to the general population or to other areas that could accommodate them, Larimer County Sheriff's spokesman John Schulz said.

Schulz said the moves created additional staffing requirements that likely will be temporary, Schulz said.

The jail is also adding temporary beds in some

areas and will allow the early release of some inmates. Early release is triggered when the female population reaches 53. There are now 75 female inmates, Schulz said.

"Early releases are used only as the last resort to control the population," he said.

The female population at the jail has increased 48 percent over the last year, going from 51 in February 2010 to 75 this month, Schulz said.

The daily average number of inmates in January was 493.

The Larimer jail was designed to handle 533 prisoners, but budget constraints and rules about how inmates are segregated according to gender, seriousness of their offenses, protective orders and medical conditions cap the number at 460.

The Larimer jail has been plagued by overcrowding for years. But voters have turned down recent attempts to expand the jail and a proposal to impose a jail-impact fee on new home construction in the county was scrapped.

Budget cutbacks have also forced the county lay off jail staffers, worsening the situation. That's why jail officials have begun to rely on early release to ease crowding.

Those who have been arrested for lesser crimes — drug distribution, burglaries and even DUIs — are generally booked and released, usually on a personal-recognizance, cash or surety bond.

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Inmates headed for early release also must adhere to conditions set by a judge.

Newly-elected Sheriff Justin Smith said handling jail overcrowding will be one of his top priorities while in office.

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