



# Money woes ending money-saving pre-trial program for Jefferson County

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By



Enlarge

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Conditions at the Jefferson County Jail, already crowded and understaffed, could get worse for inmates and their guards as budget cuts demand another 20 percent be shaved from all county departments. (The Birmingham News/Tamika Moore)

**Conditions at the Jefferson County Jail could get worse with budget cuts** gallery (5 photos)

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BIRMINGHAM, Alabama -- A new pressure point for a beleaguered Jefferson County justice system emerged today when officials with a court-assistance program announced it no longer would supervise defendants awaiting trial who otherwise **would remain in jail.**

"That's about the last thing we needed to hear on top of everything else," said Chief Deputy Randy Christian of the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office, which faces **deep budget cuts of its own** and an already overcrowded jail. "When it rains it pours."

The Treatment Alternatives for Safer Communities program, which has helped act as a pressure valve for the county jail population since 1997, **lost all of its county funding in June.**

Thursday's announcement that the program would no longer supervise defendants pretrial who otherwise could

not make bond was made after officials realized county funding in the upcoming budget year was unlikely, said Foster Cook, TASC's director.

"We understand the crisis conditions in the county jail and the value of our services to the courts and to poor people who can't afford bond," he said. "But we have exhausted our resources and ability to continue to get

people out of jail and provide supervision without funding."

Overcrowding already is a problem at the jail in Birmingham because the county does not have enough money for Sheriff Mike Hale to open the new jail in Bessemer.

"I don't know when we will see the impact but it probably means the (Birmingham) jail will get more crowded," Christian said.

TASC has supervised nearly 1,100 defendants this year who otherwise were not able to make bond, at an average cost of \$5.50 per defendant per day, TASC records show. Jailing them would have cost \$51 per day.

"Not funding TASC is penny-wise and pound foolish," said Circuit Judge Scott Vowell, the county's presiding judge. "Their services become even more critical with the jail as overcrowded as it already is."

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