

# Sedgwick County commissioner fights jail overcrowding

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WICHITA, Kansas - With the Sedgwick County Jail already overcrowded, Commissioner Karl Peterjohn is working to stop new legislation he says will only make matters worse.

The Sedgwick County Jail is not a high security prison and it was never intended to be. Yet 200 convicted felons are serving their sentences there.

"The Sedgwick County jail is becoming, in effect, a subsidiary of the Kansas Department of Corrections, but we're not getting any state funds," said Peterjohn. "Tax payers are shelling out between 4 and 5 million a year to house state prisoners in the Sedgwick County Jail."

Peterjohn is on a mission to make sure Sedgwick County tax payers aren't getting left with the state's prison bill.

The battleground is Topeka, where lawmakers are considering even stricter penalties for certain crimes. It sounds like they're being tough on offenders but the reality, according to Peterjohn, is they're being tough on taxpayers who are funding an already overcrowded jail.

"That would dramatically increase the number of people with felonies, driving while suspended, DUI and several other felony charges. They could end up in the Sedgwick County Jail. We would have an overcrowding problem overnight that would be huge," added Peterjohn.

State Representative, Pete Degraaf says he understands the issues facing the county....but they don't rank above public safety.

"Every time we pass another law, that's tougher on crime, we're actually counting beds and what the bed impact is going to be," said Degraaf. "Are you going to allow people to continue to be drunk or intoxicated on our roads? Or are you going to be stiffening the penalties? I'm one for stiffening the penalties."

Degraaf says legislators are considering opening additional wings at the Department of Correction or paying counties to help house state inmates.

Whatever the solution, it can't come soon enough for the Sedgwick County Jail and those paying to run it.

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