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## South Florida jail populations down, mirroring national trend

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Walter Michot / Miami Herald Staff

The Miami-Dade County Jail, 1321 NW 13th Street, has a population of 1,195.

Jail populations in South Florida, and across the nation, have fallen significantly during the past two years as crime rates and arrests have dipped, statistics show.

In Miami-Dade County, the average daily jail population now hovers at about 5,400, down from a high of 7,600 in 2008. The number, while still above capacity for Miami-Dade's five jails, has sapped the urgency for building the long-planned Krome pre-trial detention center.

In Broward County, the average daily population is about 4,384, down from 5,364

in 2008. That's well below capacity for the county's four jails, which is 5,144 beds.

Nationwide, the number of inmates fell from 767,434 to 748,728 in the fiscal year that ended June 30, 2010, the most recent figures available, according to the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics. That's the second straight year the nationwide jail population has fallen, according to the bureau.

Across the country, law enforcement and corrections officials credit the trend to falling crime rates, which in turn have led to fewer arrests.

In Miami-Dade, all police agencies notched 136,113 arrests in 2010, down 12 percent from 2008. In Broward in 2010, all police agencies made 80,818 arrests, down 11 percent from 2008.

Miami-Dade Police Director Jim Loftus said he believes crime is down because more citizens are cooperating with police, including in a gun bounty program that rewards tipsters for helping taking guns off the streets.

Arrests also could be down because police have less money to pay officers for expensive overtime details that generate sweeping numbers.

“I’m not worried about less arrests. I’m worried about smarter enforcement,” Loftus said.

In both Miami-Dade and Broward counties, jailers also have expanded programs that allow prisoners to be monitored from home with GPS ankle bracelets. Broward, for example, had more than 400 inmates out on GPS monitoring last year — compared to fewer than 200 in 2007.

That mirrors a national trend, said Tim Murray, director of the Washington-based Pre-trial Institute.

Murray, a former director of Miami-Dade’s pre-trial services office, said that among judges and lawyers across the nation there “certainly is a growing momentum” for finding safe and cost-effective ways to get defendants out of jail before trial.

South Florida jailers say they also have worked to cut down on the time convicted inmates stay in jail while awaiting transfer to state prison.

A few years ago, Broward inmates might spend more than a month in local custody. Sheriff Al Lamberti, whose department runs the county corrections facilities, said deputies have cut that wait time down to three days.

“Every day they are there is costing taxpayers \$118 a day,” he said.

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