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News

State eyes county for pilot project to reduce inmate population

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OSWEGO — Oswego County is currently being considered for a state pilot program that could ease capacity issues plaguing the county's correctional facility.

Oswego County Sheriff Reuel Todd noted that the pilot project, launched under the New York State Office of Criminal Supervision, would lead to the state removing "technical violators" of parole from the local jail, placing them in state-run facilities.

Todd revealed the details of the program, dubbed the "Orleans Project," during the Oswego County Legislature's Public Safety and Emergency Services Committee meeting on Monday. It was just last month that the sheriff came to the same committee to request a \$600,000 transfer from the county's unappropriated fund balance to his department's budget line intended to handle the cost of housing prisoners in jails outside the county correctional facility for the remainder of 2012. This request came due to inmate numbers exceeding the 159-person limit at the Oswego County jail. The committee chose to adjust the requested total to \$200,000, a measure that was approved by the full Legislature earlier this month.

Todd has said that the department is doing whatever it can to lessen the capacity issue burden on local taxpayers, including pushing for state parolees to be placed back into state facilities rather than housed in the local jail. The pilot program would be a step in that direction, he said.

"We're trying," Todd said to the committee on Monday. "The goal is to not spend all of the \$200,000 we requested, and if we do spend that, we don't have to come back and ask for more. That's being very optimistic, but we're trying."

Oswego County Undersheriff Eugene Sullivan noted that the Orleans Project would result in the removal of strictly technical violators of parole from the local facility. Such violators include individuals who broke the conditions of their parole, meaning they broke curfew, drank alcohol or failed to find employment as mandated by the court system.

"A technical violator ... is anyone who is on parole who has violated simply by not meeting one of their conditions of parole," the undersheriff said. "They haven't incurred any more charges or committed any other crimes."

After being removed from the local facility, the technical violator would be placed in a state prison and enrolled in an intensive rehabilitation and training program. The intention is to assist the inmates by addressing the issue that caused them to violate their parole. After completing the program, the inmates are placed back on parole within their local communities.