

NEWS

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Supervisors take action to increase county jail capacity

The San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors today took action to curtail the forced release of hundreds of criminals per month, including some "non-violent" felons, by agreeing to lease a privately operated prison in Adelanto.

The Board of Supervisors unanimously approved a 10-year lease for 120,000 square feet of space to house approximately 660 inmates in the High Desert. The facility should be available to the county no later than October 1, 2005 – many years before a new county jail could be constructed from the ground-up.

"This action by the Board of Supervisors is a major step toward improving public safety for residents of the High Desert and the entire county," said Board of Supervisors Chairman Bill Postmus, whose First District includes most of the High Desert. "This facility will allow us to keep hundreds of criminals per month where they belong -- behind bars -- instead of letting them out on the streets due to our lack of jail capacity."

The Sheriff's Department is currently being forced to release an average of 778 prisoners each month because of a lack of space. These are prisoners the Sheriff would prefer to keep incarcerated if space was available. In addition, inmates are sometimes required to sleep on the floor of existing county jail facilities.

Having a jail facility in the High Desert will address another vital need. About 25 percent of the county's jail population comes from the High Desert. Having a facility in this region will allow High Desert law enforcement personnel to spend less time transporting prisoners to facilities in the San Bernardino valley and more time protecting neighborhoods in the High Desert.

The monthly rent for the Maranatha Correctional Facility in Adelanto will be \$316,181.

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The current estimated cost to construct a new 3,000-bed detention facility is approximately \$260 million, or \$86,667 per bed. The county has the option to purchase the Maranatha facility for \$31.2 million, which includes a \$28 million purchase price plus an initial investment by the county of approximately \$3.2 million for modifications mandated by the State Board of Corrections and county safety standards. The \$31,200,000 equates to \$47,273 per bed for 660 beds.

While there are differences between the functional characteristics and security level of the Maranatha facility compared to the proposed, state-of-the art 3,000-bed facility, the value and the immediate availability of the Maranatha facility is favorable compared to the cost per bed and the time necessary to construct a new facility.