

## Study Offers Key to Freeing Jail Space

Jail a 'Dumping Ground,' Consultant Tells County

The Wichita Eagle

January 15, 2004

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The Sedgwick County jail system punishes taxpayers as well as criminals because it lacks alternatives to costly incarceration, a consultant told county commissioners Wednesday.

On consultant Alan Kalmanoff's recommendation, the commissioners voted to form a Criminal Justice Coordinating Council to review policies that could make the jail system more efficient.

The Sedgwick County Commission paid Kalmanoff, of Berkeley, Calif., \$98,500 to find alternatives to building another multimillion-dollar jail.

The county has struggled over what to do with its crowded jail, which has been full since it opened in 1999.

The jail was designed to house 1,032 inmates. On Tuesday, the county had 1,319 in custody, including 199 housed in other jails.

"The jail's become the dumping ground," Kalmanoff said.

According to his report, the jail population is growing because it takes inmates longer to get through the system, not because of rising crime rates or population growth.

His presentation to the commissioners was accompanied by a 178-page report, which **offers dozens of suggestions for saving money.**

For example, the report encourages officers to issue citations rather than arrest people who commit some minor crimes and don't pose a threat to the public.

Traffic offenses - specifically driving under suspension and speeding - are the most common crimes that create new inmates.

Kalmanoff said 51 percent of the county's jail population is minimum-security inmates housed in a maximum-security facility.

He said 73 percent of the inmates are misdemeanor offenders, people who are usually "bagging your groceries," not "Jack the Ripper."

He recommended that the county find alternatives to jail for criminal offenders who don't appear to pose any physical harm to society. He cited shoplifters, car thieves, traffic violators and other "lightweight offenders."

"You're jailing people who don't need to be jailed," he said. "Ask yourself , 'Why are they there?' Ask yourself, 'How long should they be there?' "

He said **the jail system now consumes about 8 percent of the county budget but, if current trends continue, threatens to consume 30 percent by 2025.**

The Coordinating Council that commissioners approved Wednesday will include representatives from the County Commission, the Sedgwick County district attorney's office, municipal and district judges, city of Wichita staff and the Wichita City Council.

The council also should include someone who represents victims, Sheriff Gary Steed said.

While the county may be able to reduce the number of people in the jail, an expansion may still be necessary.

However, Commissioner Ben Sciortino said that if a new jail is built, it could be a medium- or minimum-security facility, which would cost less than adding a maximum-security facility.

Commissioners also would like to find a way to house two inmates to a cell. And they want to work with state legislators to review state laws that require specific jail time for certain offenses, Commissioner Carolyn McGinn said.

Commissioners were concerned about some points in the report.

Commissioner Dave Unruh raised questions about public safety, and Commissioner Tom Winters wondered whether jail alternatives would provide ammunition for election opponents who may portray commissioners as not being tough on crime.

Kalmanoff said **his recommendations can be sold to voters as a way to stop punishing the taxpayers and start punishing the criminals.**