

Evaluation of the Sangamon County Criminal Justice System

Executive Summary



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SANGAMON COUNTY EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report shows there are many factors that have played a role in the growth of the Sangamon County Jail population. However, the county's jail crowding issue is manageable. We conclude that a comprehensive program that encompasses capacity management initiatives, justice system process improvements, program alternatives to incarceration, information management, and improved policy coordination, will effectively address current and projected jail crowding issues. The county justice system can effectively respond to jail crowding without recourse to physical expansion of the jail or construction of new jail facilities.

Population Analysis

The jail population has grown rapidly in the last eight years. From 2000 through 2006, the average daily jail population increased by 57 percent from 237 to 372. In June 2003, the population climbed over its design capacity of 314 and has since never consistently fallen below that level. Our analysis of the jail population makes the following findings:

- This growth is not attributable to the external factors that typically drive jail populations. Crime is down from historical levels, arrest rates are flat, jail bookings are steady, and underlying community demographics appear stable.
- Internal justice system dynamics are driving growth. An increasing proportion of filings and bookings are felony cases, with significantly longer lengths of stay. The average length of stay for misdemeanants has gone up by 3 days or 21 percent, since 2000. Admissions held longer than 24 hours are increasing. Length of stay for offenders released on bond is increasing. The number of females held in the jail has increased by nearly 300 percent over the last eight years and now makes up over 14 percent of the total jail population.
- This past growth notwithstanding, we project very slow future growth for the jail population. The jail's population will increase at a rate of 0.8 percent per year, rising to an average daily population of 396 in 2012, and 416 by 2018.

Capacity Management

The Sangamon County Jail's rated capacity of 314, assumes a total double-celling rate of 27 percent. In comparison with other county jails, states and national standards, Sangamon County makes extremely conservative use of double occupancy cells. Moreover, the Sangamon County jail currently sleeps offenders on the floors of the cells when its population rises above its rated capacity. The operation of the jail would be better served by installing permanent 2nd bunks in cells and increasing the rated capacity of the jail to reflect these additional beds. This action would reduce the current potential liability at the jail posed by sleeping inmates on the floor,

improve living conditions in the jail housing units, and help address current and projected levels of crowding. If half of the current general population cells (excluding segregation and medical) are permanently double-bunked, and all dormitories remain double-bunked, the rated capacity of the jail will increase rise by 88 beds to 402. At a 75 percent rate of double-celling, the rated capacity of the jail climbs to 444 beds. This increase would easily accommodate the population peaks recently experienced by the jail. For those times when the population exceeds reasonable capacity levels, the jail should develop a formal population/capacity management plan that outlines operational steps to assure the safety and security of the facility at times of extreme crowding.

Justice System Process Improvements

Our review of county justice system processing identified a number of issues, which if addressed, could result in more efficient case processing and less pressure on the jail. Key findings include:

- Expanded use of Notice to Appear (NTA) citations and implementation of jail booking fees are proven means to assure jail bookings are reserved for appropriately serious offenders.
- Requiring bond reports, assuring adequate public defender representation, and offering appropriate plea agreements as early as possible in the judicial process, are effective mechanisms for expediting the movement of low-level offenders out of the jail.
- Establishing a protocol for the maximum duration of felony trials would increase impetus to speed up court processing of more serious offenders.
- Ensuring adequate salary levels for State's Attorney and Public Defender staff attorneys is critical to reduce staff turnover and assure the productive, professional casework that results in efficient justice system processing.

Alternative Programs

The county makes relatively little use of jail diversion programs as a means of controlling offender population levels. Many counties employ such programs, which rely on systematic risk screening that ensures offenders meet stringent criteria for placement. We reviewed home confinement, work, and pre-trial supervision programs that all appear to be effective models for diverting low-risk pre-trial and sentenced offenders. The program with the most significant potential for Sangamon County appears to be pretrial supervision targeted to defendants who have been in custody for a week or more and who have been unable to secure release via bail or

their own recognizance. The research on these programs shows very low rates of “failure to appear” and pretrial crime rates, along with significant impact on jail population levels.

Information Management

County justice system agencies have very little data to develop metrics that indicate processing efficiency and operational performance. There are few standard monthly reports summarizing basic data such as bookings, dispositions, or releases. Although these data may exist in “piece meal” format, there are few summary reports available that can be run on command. Regular reporting and analysis of activity and performance measures provides management with tools to improve operational efficiency and improve accountability. The development of a “dashboard” of key performance measures for all key stakeholder justice system agencies can be a critical management tool for guiding policy development.

Communication and Coordination

Key justice stakeholders – the sheriff’s office, the judiciary, the State’s Attorney, the Public Defender, and the County Board, generally recognize the potential benefit of working together, but the ongoing demands and challenges faced by each individual stakeholder tend to make such efforts a lower priority than addressing more immediate issues. The County Board does host a large gathering of key justice managers on a regular basis, but these meetings do not provide an adequate forum for policy discussions.

Lack of coordination and communication comes at a price. Many local governments find that even limited efforts at inter-agency coordination help streamline the entire local justice system by improving policy planning and cooperation among law enforcement, court, and correctional agencies.

There are a variety of models to facilitate policy communication and coordination among local government and justice system stakeholders, ranging from chartered policy councils to more informal management working groups. These models begin from the premise that each actor in the local justice system has a unique role, but that better justice system outcomes can result from collaboration on policy and information-sharing. Sangamon County should begin the process of developing a system where justice system stakeholders and local government officials can approach policy planning on a systemic basis. Creation of a forum for meaningful communication and coordination on vital justice system issues would be a major step in this direction. This effort

also requires a commitment on the part of all justice system agencies to further develop and share their performance measurement data.

Summary of Key Findings and Recommendations

1. The county does not require new or expanded jail facilities to manage the projected jail population over the next ten years.
2. Installing a limited number of double bunks in general population cells can safely increase jail capacity.
3. The County should not invest resources in converting available space at the Sangamon County Juvenile Detention Facility to housing for adult offenders.
4. Development of formal policies that direct operational responses during periods of high population levels will improve management preparedness for periods of extreme crowding, should they arise.
5. The Superintendent and select management staff at the jail should receive professional jail administrator training.
6. The Sheriff's Office should develop detailed policy and procedures on issuance of "Notice to Appear" citations for county deputies and jail booking staff.
7. County justice system stakeholders should review the advisability of issuing Notices to Appear citations for minor felonies.
8. County justice system stakeholders should develop a policy to impose a reasonable booking fee on law enforcement agencies bringing arrestees to the jail.
9. Sangamon County should establish a system for preparing bond reports on all offenders prior to their initial bond hearing.
10. The hiring of two additional full-time Assistant Public Defenders to lower caseloads and improve case processing efficiency is an important needed step to improved case processing.
11. Sangamon County justice system stakeholders should assess the implementation of felony case processing protocols.
12. Increased salaries for Assistant State's Attorney staffing and Assistant Public Defenders will reduce staff turnover and help assure more professional, productive casework.
13. Each justice system stakeholder office should designate case coordinators to monitor and expedite case processing.
14. Requiring early plea offers for misdemeanor and low-level felony offenses will improve the flow of low-level offenders out of the jail.
15. The county should develop program alternatives to incarceration, beginning with a pre-trial supervision program.
16. Information technology staff in the Sheriff's office should identify data available in the New World system and improve its reporting capability.

17. County justice system agencies need comprehensive review of data system and management reporting needs.
18. Development of a management reporting system that establishes metrics to evaluate the performance of each actor in the local justice system will improve stakeholder knowledge of key operational trends and help inform more effective policymaking.
19. Sangamon County should form a Criminal Justice Council to improve coordination of policymaking and operations among key justice system stakeholders.
20. Periodic objective performance audits of the justice system to provide ongoing assessments of progress on the issues identified in this report would keep stakeholders on top of emerging trends and allow for continued refinement of policies to address key issues.