

News Release

Pueblo Board Of County Commissioners



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PUEBLO – The Pueblo County Jail Task force believes a detox and substance abuse treatment center could play a critical role in helping reduce the surging population of the jail and help reverse some negative trends seen in the community.

This conclusion was revealed in the Jail Task Force's comprehensive report, which was delivered to the public during a presentation at the Sangre De Cristo Arts Center, on Wednesday, August 30, 2017.

Operating a county jail carries one of the greatest, if not the greatest, risks of liability claims for Pueblo County government. Multi-million-dollar verdicts are not uncommon in litigation stemming from inadequate jail facilities, and courts often exercise their powers of oversight granted in the constitution, which may include a mandate to remedy unsafe jail conditions.

The task force delivered the report as well as a seven-minute video documenting the existing infrastructure problems, overcrowding and safety issues as well as the effects these issues are having on the community. Both the report and the video are available on the county's website at <http://county.pueblo.org/JailTaskForce>.

The comprehensive report provides an overview of the issues the more than 30-person task force studied throughout the last five months, as well as full disclosure of the analysis that went into the conclusions drawn from their studies.

According to a survey of Colorado's 10 large counties, the Pueblo County jail is the most over-crowded county jail, operating at an average of 145 percent above capacity. The overcrowding is putting detention deputies' and inmates' safety at risk and exacerbating the jail's overall aging conditions.

Currently, the jail's critical building system needs, overcrowding and safety hazards, have cost Pueblo County, and ultimately tax payers, approximately \$1.8 million in budget overages for 2017. Those maintenance overages are projected to cost Pueblo County nearly \$14.7 million by 2024 if the aging infrastructure and overcrowding issues continue.

Pueblo County has the highest rate of fatal heroin overdoses in Colorado according to Dr. Michael Nerenberg, director of Point Access Pueblo, a needle-exchange program in Pueblo.

“One of the largest issues we have needed to tackle in County government is and has been the county jail. I understand the funding of a new jail may not be the most attractive project, but at some point we will be forced legally to deal with this. And instead of neglecting the problem in hopes it will go away, I want to be responsible and deal with this on our terms,” Pueblo County Commissioner Garrison Ortiz said.

Ultimately, the task force has concluded that repurposing Pueblo County’s existing jail dormitory to become a detox and treatment center and constructing a new jail is the best option to address the jail’s aging-infrastructure needs and overcrowding problems.

The Pueblo County Jail Task Force is committed to addressing questions from the public. All of the questions that were submitted anonymously during the Pueblo County Jail Task Force’s public meeting on Wednesday, August 30 will be posted on the Jail Task Force’s webpage in the most Frequently Asked Questions section.

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