

Pompeo: State Department will follow law in impeachment inquiry » A4

# BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

SUNDAY, October 6, 2019

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Southwest Virginia-Northeast Tennessee | The Birthplace of Country Music® | 2010 Pulitzer Prize for Public Service | 2018 Scripps Howard Award for Community Journalism

## SPECIAL REPORT DAY 1

# 'CRITICAL MASS'

### Local lockups face imminent overcrowding crisis



ANDRE TEAGUE/BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

Inmates in the crowded Bristol Virginia Jail. Though on a smaller scale than at the Sullivan County jail, the Bristol facility still faces an overcrowding crisis that plays out on a daily basis.

BY DAVID MCGEE | BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

**S**tep into the long, linear jail cell so overcrowded there is scant room to sit or sleep, save for a few unoccupied patches of concrete floor. ♦ Inmates wearing faded jumpsuits with black-and-white stripes and bright orange Crocs stare back blankly as the large door of gray metal bars slams shut. Welcome to the general population at Tennessee's most overcrowded jail. ♦ A 1980s-era, two-story lockup originally designed to house 200-plus inmates, the main Sullivan County jail typically holds more than 650. Cells designed for 16 people often contain as many as 50, who must share a single shower and two toilets. Bedding is at a premium. Many sleep on towels on the concrete floor; some snuggle up near the toilets. ♦ Sardines may have more space.

See **JAIL**, Page A8



**CRITICAL MASS**

Unlocking the factors behind the jail overcrowding problem in Sullivan County and Bristol, Va.

**INSIDE**


- » Results of jail overcrowding report **A9**
- » By the numbers **A6-7** » Key findings **A8**
- » Key terms **A8** » Key players. **A9**
- » Why we did this project. **A12**

**ONLINE**

- » Follow this series at [HeraldCourier.com](http://HeraldCourier.com).

**TOWN HALL**

7 p.m. Oct. 9  
Old Sullivan County Courthouse  
Second-floor conference room



**COMING MONDAY:** » The current state of Sullivan County's jail facilities

## 'Just deplorable': Minister recalls Bristol city jail

BY JOE TENNIS  
BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

When Steven L. Davis Sr. was a kid, he stole some green cupcakes on St. Patrick's Day. "And my father whipped my butt so bad that I never stole again," he said.

But then his daddy died when Steven was 13. Someone on the street told him, "It's OK to cry. You're the man of the house now."

That was a bad break, for sure, growing up in the concrete confines of Cleveland, Ohio. Yet the future held promise: Davis' mother was still working, and the young teen had two older

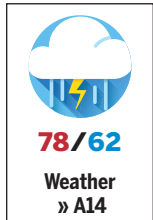


Davis

See **DAVIS**, Page A9



Thank you, **F.D. Robertson**, for subscribing to the Bristol Herald Courier.



**INSIDE**

Tennessee High hosts 29 bands in 68th annual Music in the Castle » B1

WR Yates sets single-game record for E&H in 56-17 ODAC victory » C1



**INSIDE: CLASSIFIED E1-10 | COMICS INSERT | DEATHS B2-3 | OPINION A12 | SCOREBOARD C2 | TELEVISION INSERT**



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BY TEARSCIENCE

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Amy Young, MD | Jeff Carlsen, MD | Jennifer Oakley, MD | Alan McCartt, MD

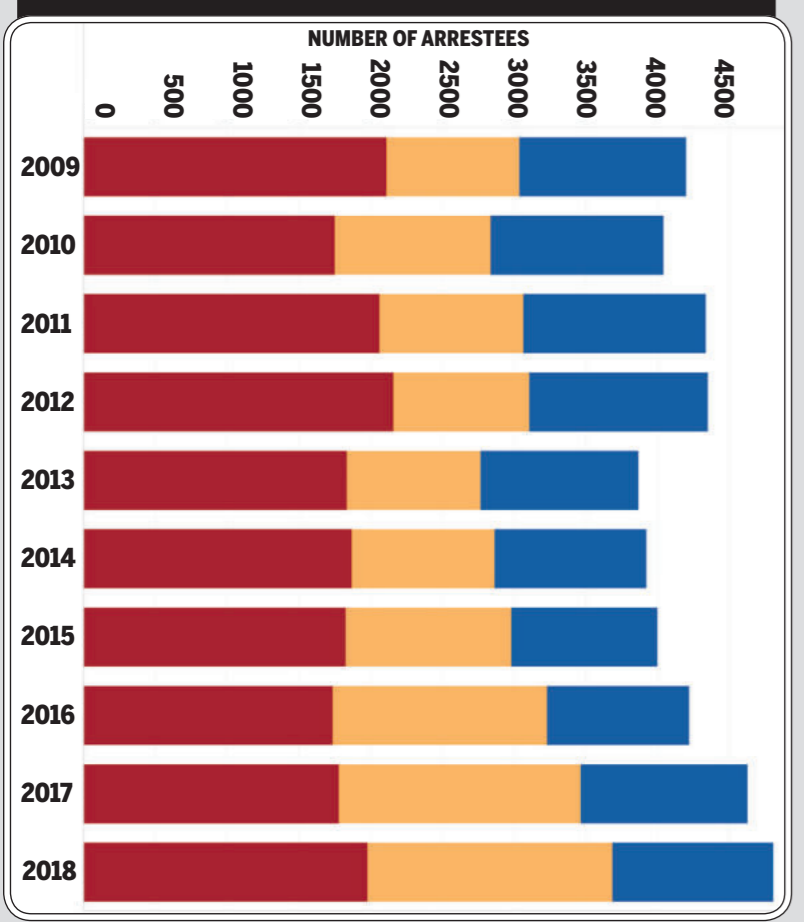
# CRITICAL MASS: BY THE NUMBERS

**ABOUT ARREST DATA:** Crimes against society generally represent prohibition against certain types of activity and include drug and narcotic violations, animal cruelty and prostitution. Crimes against persons usually involves bodily harm, the threat of bodily harm or other actions committed against someone's will and include assault, murder and sexual assault. Crimes against property generally refers to taking or damaging someone else's property and include theft, arson and fraud.

**ABOUT THIS PAGE:** Data on this page came from the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation's TIBRS database and Virginia State Police's NIBRS database. Dale King, TBI criminal justice information services supervisor, said because of limitations in the database, data for arrests and drug crime data are not directly comparable. Additionally, this data contains arrests of individuals who are under the age of 18, and minors are not housed at either the Sullivan County jail or Bristol Virginia Jail.

**ABOUT DRUG DATA:** These numbers show the most common drugs associated with arrests for the Sullivan County Sheriff's Office and Bristol Virginia Police Department in 2018. The "other drugs" category includes hallucinogens, depressants, non-amphetamine stimulants and other types of drugs not otherwise defined in TBI or VSP's databases. Opioids like heroin, opium and morphine, as well as synthetic opioids like fentanyl, accounted for a relatively low number of arrests. However, it is unclear how many arrests occurred related to prescription opioids like Oxycotin, as neither TBI or VSP's databases had a specific category for them.

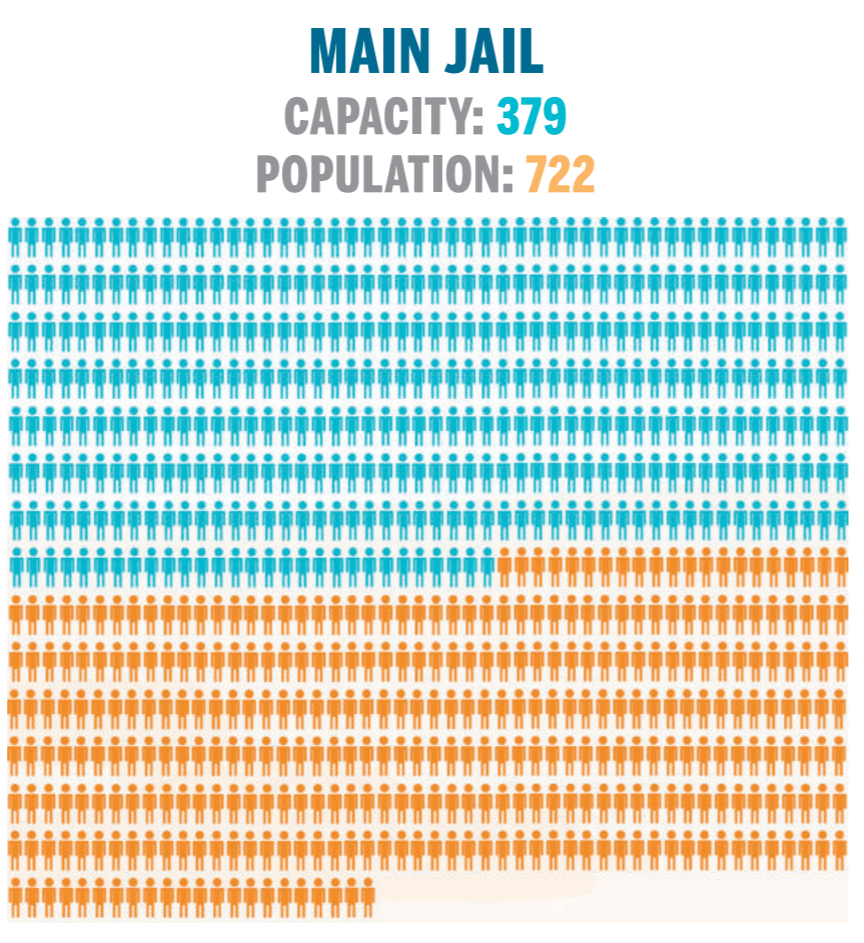
## SULLIVAN COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE



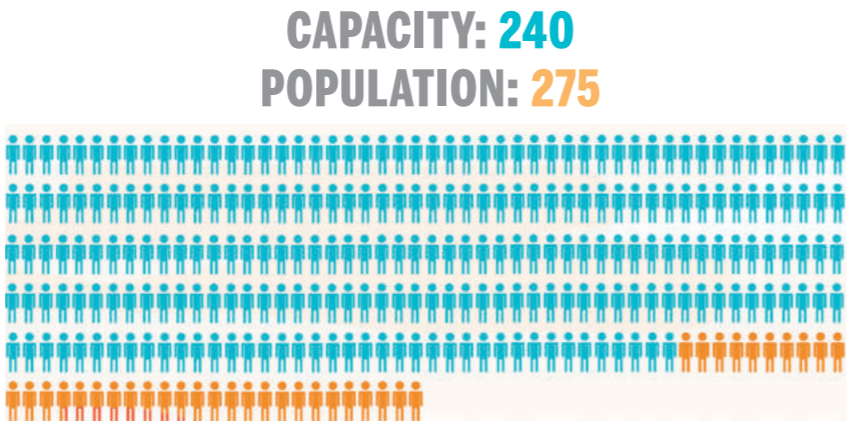
■ Crimes against property ■ Crimes against society ■ Crimes against persons

## AVERAGE DAILY JAIL POPULATION

### SULLIVAN COUNTY

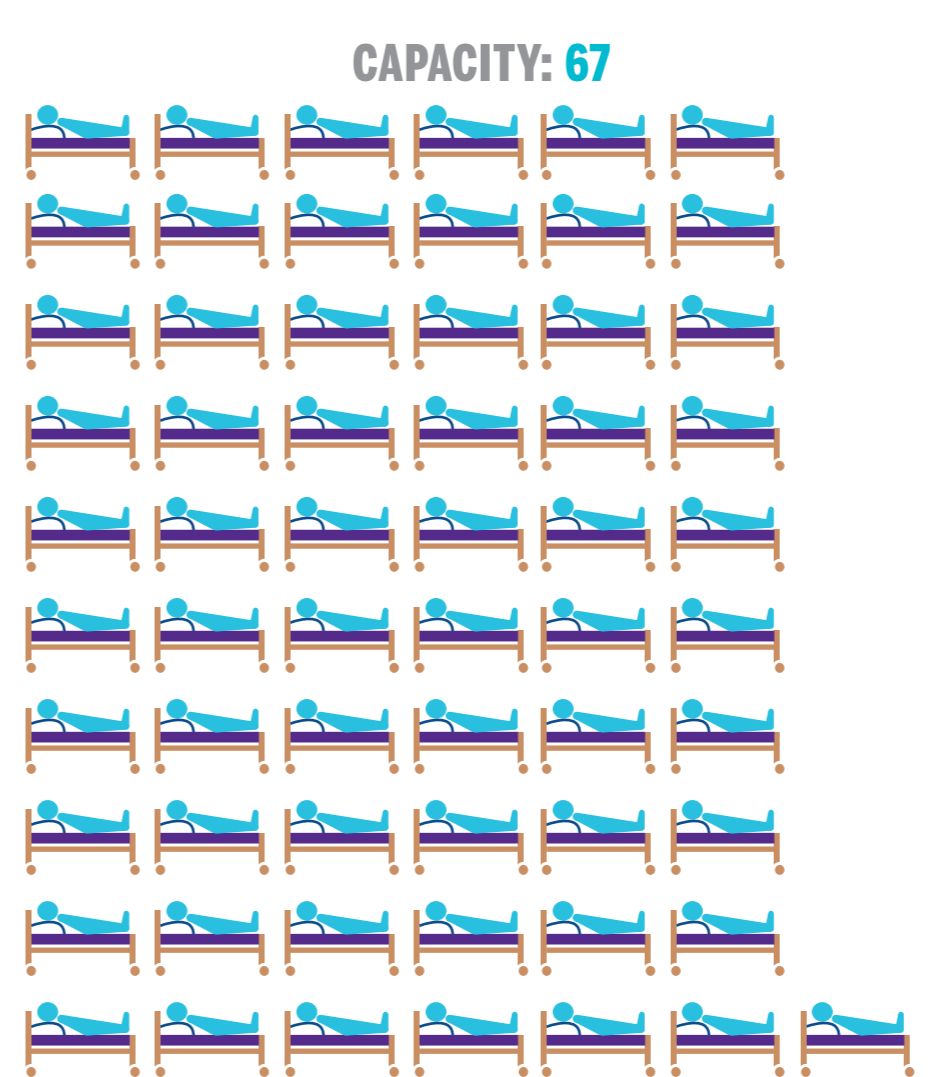


### EXTENSION

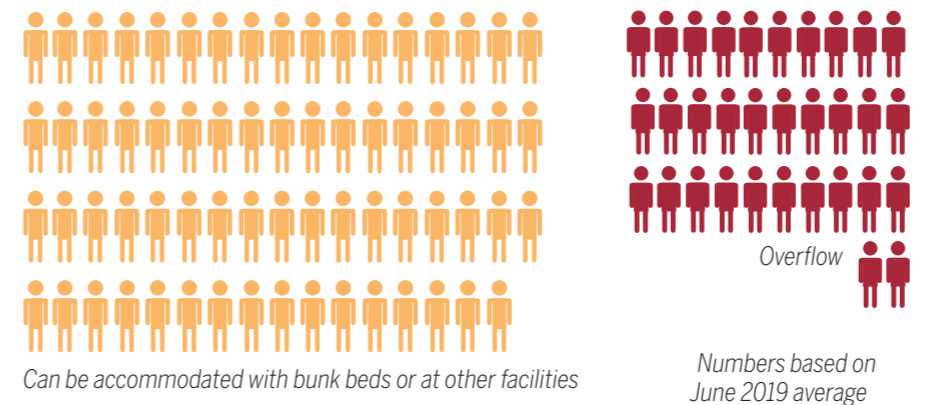


**CAPACITY: 619 / TOTAL: 997**  
Numbers as of July 31, 2019

### BRISTOL, VIRGINIA



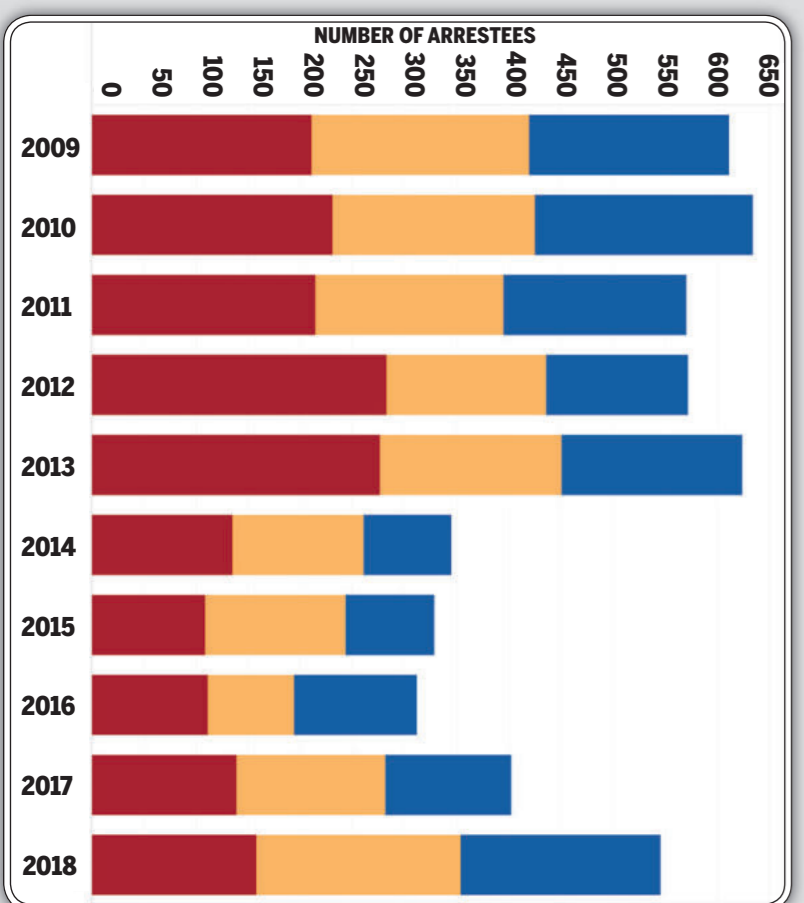
**SLEEPING CAPACITY: 134**      **TOTAL: 156**



Can be accommodated with bunk beds or at other facilities

## ARRESTS

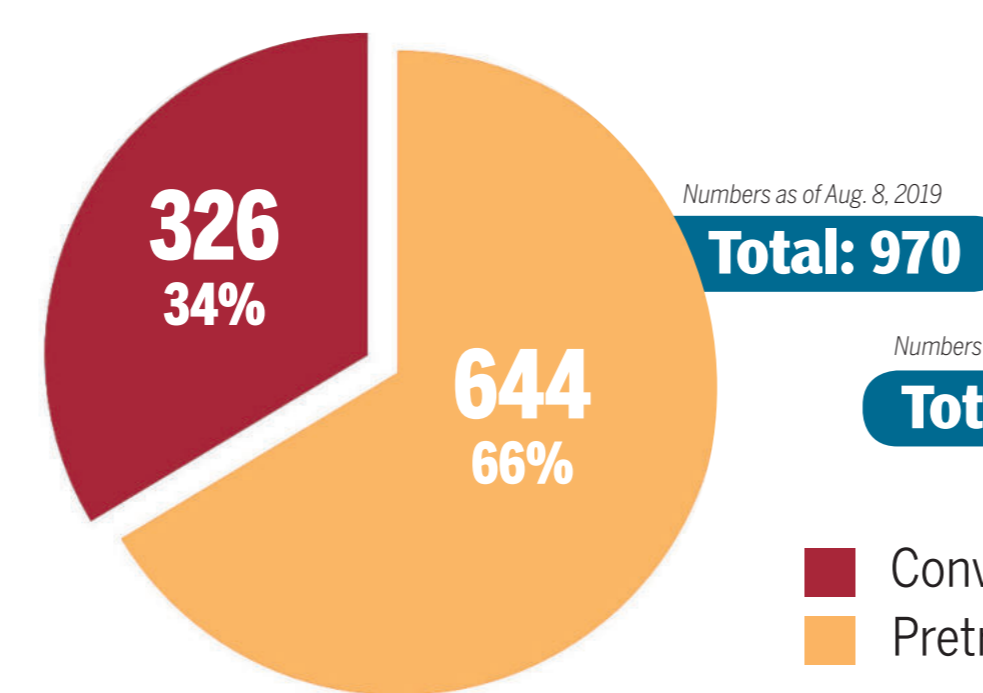
■ Crimes against property ■ Crimes against society ■ Crimes against persons



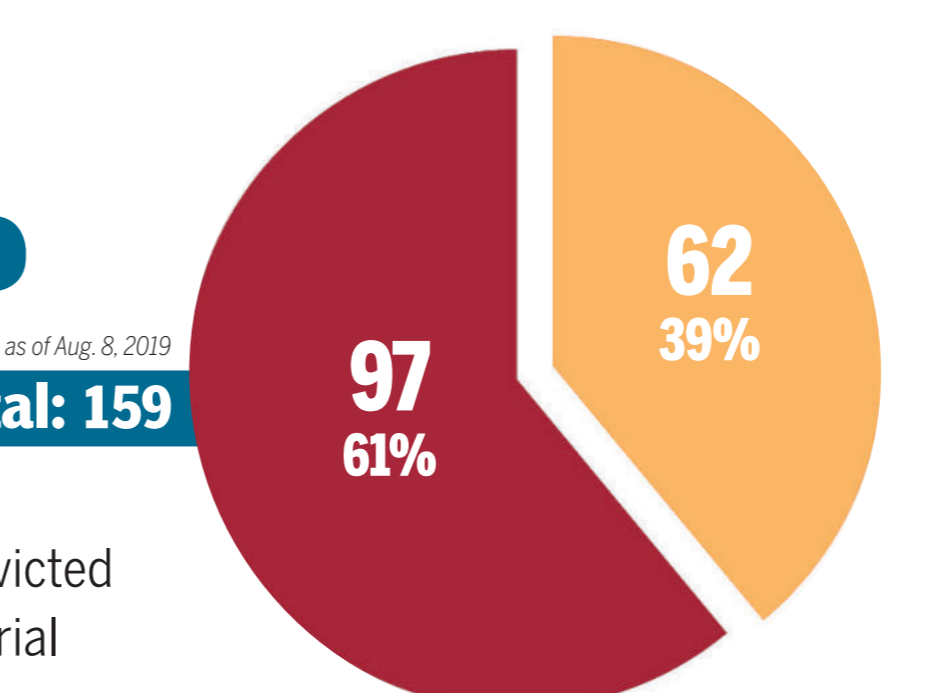
## BRISTOL VIRGINIA POLICE DEPARTMENT

## INMATES AWAITING TRIAL

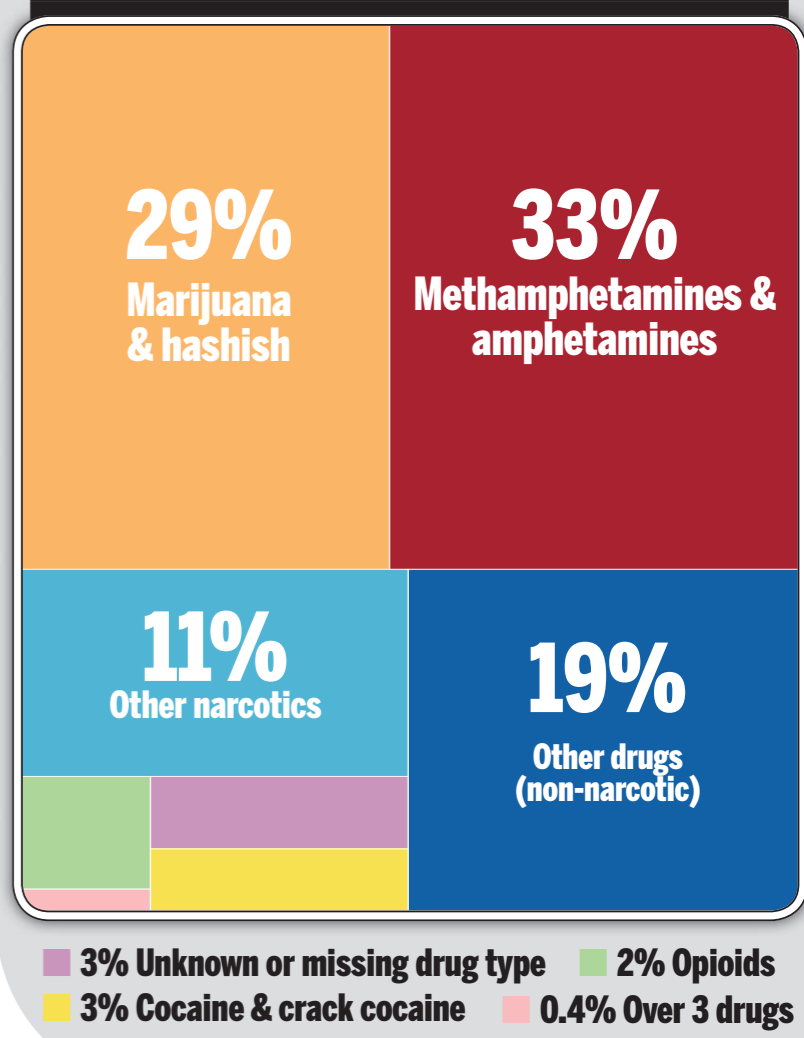
### SULLIVAN COUNTY



### BRISTOL, VIRGINIA

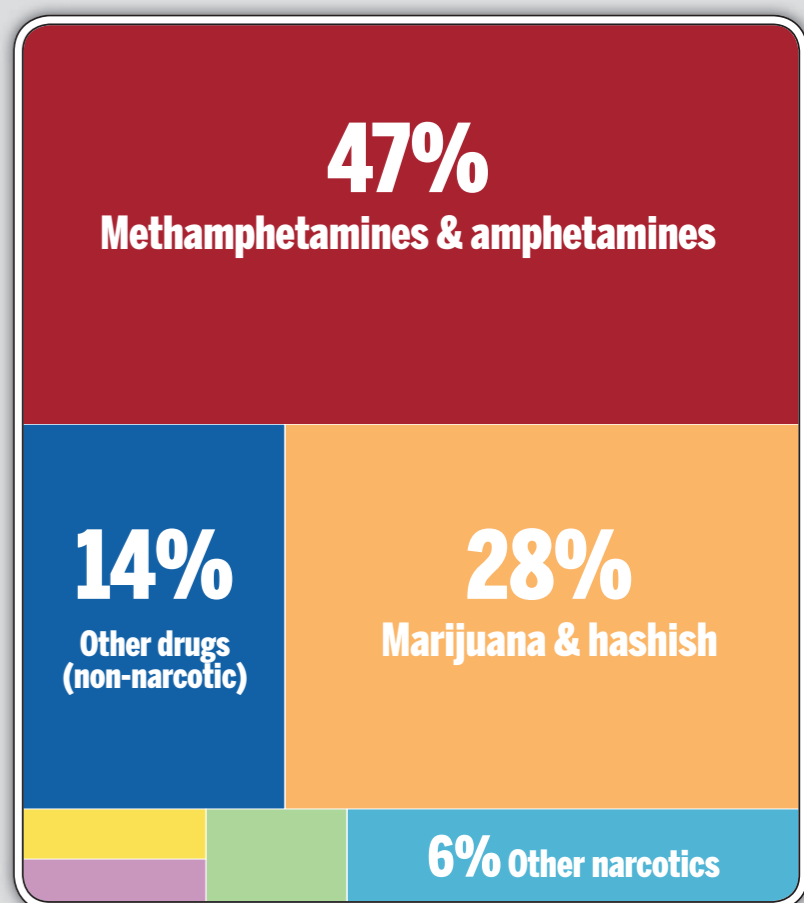


## SULLIVAN COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE



## DRUG TYPES

■ 2% Opioids ■ 1% Cocaine & crack cocaine ■ 1% Unknown or missing drug type



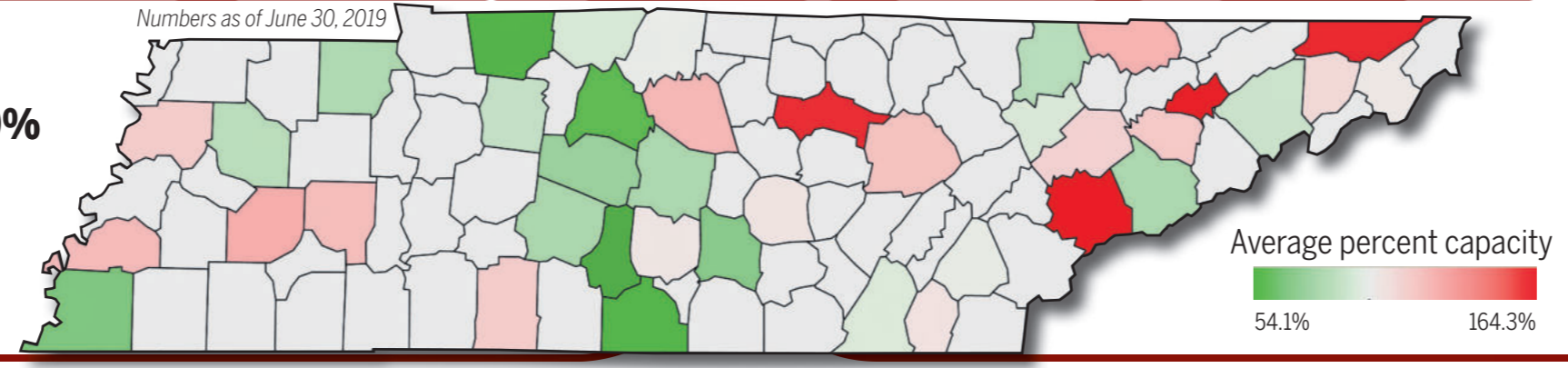
## BRISTOL VIRGINIA POLICE DEPARTMENT

## A LOOK AT JAILS IN TENNESSEE

### 2019 MEDIAN CAPACITY (Jails with 200-1000 beds)

1. Sullivan: 175.59%
2. Blount: 170.14%
3. Hamblen: 159.22%
4. Putnam: 153.57%
5. Madison CJC: 142.6%
6. Sullivan Extension: 122.29%
7. Wilson: 121.07%
8. Cumberland: 119.81%
9. Claiborne: 119.76%
10. Tipton: 118.66%

Numbers as of June 30, 2019



### INMATES PER 1,000 RESIDENTS (Counties with populations greater than 100,000)

1. Sullivan: 6.06
2. Washington: 5.24
3. Shelby: 5.19
4. Bradley: 5
5. Blount: 4.53
6. Sumner: 4.33
7. Hamilton: 4.15
8. Wilson: 3.9
9. Rutherford: 3.29
10. Knox: 3.27

# CRITICAL MASS



ANDRE TEAGUE/BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

Inmates in the Bristol Virginia Jail pass their time in the cramped and overcrowded women's cell. With a capacity of 67, the jail's daily census exceeds 150.

## Jail

From Page A1

In 2017 — with a daily average of about 730 prisoners — Sullivan County Criminal Court Judge Jim Goodwin warned a county committee the grossly overcrowded jail had achieved “critical mass” and should be addressed immediately.

At that same meeting, county District Attorney General Barry Staubus termed the overcrowding a “crisis.”

In the two years since those warnings, the numbers have only increased. On Aug. 31, 2019, Sullivan's main jail held 746 prisoners, 196.8% of its rated capacity of 379 beds, Tennessee Corrections Institute records show. That 367-bed deficit made it the state's most overcrowded jail for that month for facilities with more than 350 inmates.

Just up the hill, another nearly 300 prisoners were squeezed into the “extension,” a single-story cinderblock building constructed to house minimum security, non-violent day workers. Thanks to the ongoing overcrowding crisis, many current occupants have lengthy felony records. There are locked doors but no fence topped with razor wire encircling the structure, and a serene neighborhood lies just a few steps from the back door.

On Aug. 31, 2019, the extension held 274 prisoners, or 114% of its capacity of 240 beds. Combined, the two facilities had 1,020 prisoners in spaces certified for 619. Totals have hovered slightly around 1,000 since the April report's total of 1,024 inmates, including 722 in the main jail and 302 in the extension.

For the first eight months of 2019, Sullivan's average monthly total head count was 976.

Inmates are released every day — sometimes 25 or 30 — but just as many are typically booked in around the clock like a never-ending merry-go-round.

Inmates once nicknamed Sullivan's bulging jail the “Thunder Dome,” after the post-apocalyptic movie “Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome,” with its cast of psychotic characters.

Hollywood comparisons aside, it is dangerous inside these walls. Incidents of inmate-on-inmate violence are common — almost daily. Sometimes, guards are assault victims.

With such overcrowding, jailers admit it is harder than ever to separate predator from prey.

## KEY FINDINGS

Several months of investigation by the Bristol Herald Courier revealed:

- » The Sullivan County Detention Center in Blountville is the **most overcrowded** jail in Tennessee, of facilities housing more than 350 prisoners, according to the Tennessee Department of Corrections. Its average monthly population has skyrocketed from about 730 in 2017 to about 1,000 in 2019.
- » Sullivan County leaders currently have **two options** to address the jail's long-term housing needs. Proposed by a Knoxville architectural firm, the plans would expand one or both current facilities at a cost of up to \$70 million or build new for \$110 million.
- » If Sullivan County officials decide to build a **new \$110 million jail**, it would cost each of the county's more than 156,000 residents nearly \$700 while the cost per household would be \$1,656.
- » The Bristol Virginia Jail is licensed by the state to hold 67 inmates but has an **average daily population of 160**. For years, the city has paid hundreds of thousands of dollars annually to house excess prisoners in other jails.
- » Due to Bristol Virginia's **tenuous financial position**, the city doesn't have the borrowing capacity to construct or expand its existing jail facilities and — at current prisoner levels — it would cost more to house all its prisoners elsewhere and close its jail.
- » Sheriffs in both jurisdictions estimate 75% to 80% of their inmates were arrested on **drug or drug-related charges**.
- » **Pretrial inmates** — those who remain incarcerated but have not yet been convicted of a crime — account for a majority of the prisoners housed at the packed jails in Bristol, Virginia and Sullivan County, Tennessee.
- » Due to **few mental health services** in the region, many people in a crisis end up incarcerated in local jails. Currently, about 15% of the jail population in Sullivan County is on mental health medications.



### ONLINE

What do you think is the answer to local jail overcrowding? Take our poll at [HeraldCourier.com](http://HeraldCourier.com).

HeraldCourier.com.

There is also a commonly held public misconception that a majority of those inmates face marijuana possession, check kiting or other minor charges, Sheriff Jeff Cassidy said. In truth, the maximum security section includes a dozen men charged with murder. More than 66% of inmates are convicted of or charged with felonies including attempted murder, aggravated assault, rape, kidnapping, aggravated burglary and a litany of other violence.

Besides being desperately overcrowded, Sullivan's jail is minimally staffed, and senior jail officials use words like “crisis” and “tragedy” in describing conditions and what could potentially occur there.

An average 12-hour shift is supposed to have 21 officers watching over roughly 1,000 inmates. Many times it's 19, and all too often it's only 17 — an average of one officer for nearly 60 prisoners. Overtime is standard procedure. Employees get called in to work constantly; staff burnout and turnover are epidemic, according to Chief Jail Administrator Lee Carswell.

Up to 10 prisoners at any given time may be segregated on

suicide watch, and many others have significant medical needs. Two LPNs are assigned to each 12-hour shift.

Monday through Friday, six transportation officers shuttle prisoners to courthouses in Bristol, Kingsport and the adjacent county justice center. Many days, up to 80 must be driven the roughly hourlong round trip to Kingsport. Vans hold 16 prisoners and no more than two guards. Often, one guard makes the return trip to Blountville while the other remains in Kingsport

# 60:1

Often, the inmates-to-officer ratio at the Sullivan County jail.

to oversee those who will return later.

There are treks to prisons on the other side of the state, transports for mental health evaluations and trips to other states to pick up prisoners. Vehicle transmissions are rarely left in park.

Earlier this year, the sheriff begged the Sullivan County Commission to fund 32 more positions, including guards and medical personnel, to help relieve security and overtime concerns. The commission re-

sponded with funding for just 10.

Capt. Brian Dillard oversees day-to-day jail operations and calls it a miracle that one of his officers hasn't been seriously injured or worse.

The Sullivan County jail's operating budget for fiscal 2019-20 is \$9 million, and the county has the capacity — if needed — to borrow the money to replace or expand the facility. Discussions are underway among elected county commissioners, but taxpayers are already on the hook for a \$94 million building spree to construct new consolidated middle and high schools. Estimates show expanding could cost more than \$80 million, and a new jail could cost \$110 million.

### Crisis on a smaller scale

Some 10 miles away in Bristol and 500 yards across the state line in Virginia, a smaller scale crisis plays out in the city-run Bristol Virginia jail.

Constructed in 1969-70 with a capacity of 67 inmates, its daily census has continually exceeded 150 for many years. Fitted with bunk beds, this two-story, 21,000-square-foot jail has a sleeping capacity of 134, meaning the remainder must sleep on the floor.

Bristol's culture appears a bit calmer than Sullivan; there are fewer violent offenders, but it is still jail, and forcing 160 people to share a small space is far from ideal.

The plumbing is old — sometimes showers are scalding hot, other times cold. Water pipes leak; so do the toilets. Sixteen people are typically housed in pods designed for fewer than half that.

And the tiny, overcrowded jail can't begin to hold all the city's prisoners.

That means cash-strapped Bristol pays tens of thousands of dollars each month to keep more than 60 of its prisoners elsewhere — typically in Abingdon's Southwest Virginia Regional Jail. During the past 12 months, taxpayers forked over an additional \$600,000 to house, feed and care for the overflow.

Twice in the last decade, city leaders have studied closing the jail, transferring all prisoners to the regional jail and saving operational and some staffing costs. Both times, the average daily rate of housing 200 prisoners at Abingdon exceeded those costs. In November 2014, City Council rejected a regional jail agreement that would have cost the city an additional \$1.2 million annually.

Because it is connected to the city courthouse, there are also considerations of getting prisoners from Abingdon or another regional jail facility to and from appearances in the city courthouse.

While Sullivan leaders ponder expanding the current jail or constructing a new one, that isn't in the cards for Bristol. A new jail could cost \$40 million, but the city reached its fiscal borrowing limit years ago and is paying down the \$50 million it borrowed since 2012 for The Falls, a still half-empty shopping center near Interstate 81's Exit 5.

With prisoner numbers rising despite a series of attempted fixes, the regional jail option again looms large on the city's horizon.

## KEY TERMS

**Alternative sentencing** – Court-managed community programs designed to help rehabilitate defendants while serving a sentence outside of confinement.

**Bail** – Conditional, temporary release of an accused person awaiting trial, with the promise to return for trial and usually accompanied by payment of money.

**Bond** – Dollar amount set by a judge that defendant must pay before being released prior to trial.

**Cell block** – A group of cells used to confine inmates within a jail or prison.

**Drug court** – A court-managed program designed to rehabilitate defendants with substance abuse or addiction issues.

**Drug screen** – A nearly instantaneous test administered on-site to determine if an individual has traces of illegal drugs, prescription medications or alcohol in their bloodstream — usually by chemically analyzing urine or saliva.

**Drug test** – A more detailed examination of urine, blood, saliva or hair to find trace amounts of drugs or alcohol, normally performed in a lab and needing several days to finalize results.

**Electronic monitoring** – A court-managed system where defendants may be released out of confinement by constantly wearing a monitor showing their location and regularly checking in.

**Felony** – A serious crime punishable by more than one year in jail or prison.

**General population** – Jail or prison cell blocks where prisoners are allowed to roam outside individual cells.

**Holding cell** – Place where defendants are temporarily held awaiting a court appearance.

**Incarceration** – Being confined inside a jail or prison.

**Isolation** – Cell containing a single inmate, often used for those considered likely to commit suicide or as punishment to segregate them from other inmates.

**Jail** – Locally run facility for confining people either before trial or after conviction.

**Methamphetamine** – A powerful, highly addictive stimulant popular in this area because it can be easily and cheaply made.

**Misdemeanor** – Crimes that carry a sentence of less than one year behind bars.

**Parole** – Court-ordered release of a prisoner before completion of sentence, either permanently or temporarily for a special purpose.

**Pretrial** – Concerning someone charged with a crime who has not been convicted or sentenced.

**Prison** – State- or federally run facility used to confine people convicted of a serious crime with a sentence of at least one year.

**Probation** – Court-ordered and supervised release of an offender from detention, subject to a period of good behavior.

**Property crime** – The FBI classifies burglary, larceny, theft, motor vehicle theft and arson as crimes perpetrated against objects not involving force against people.

**Recidivism** – Tendency of a convicted criminal to reoffend after release from custody.

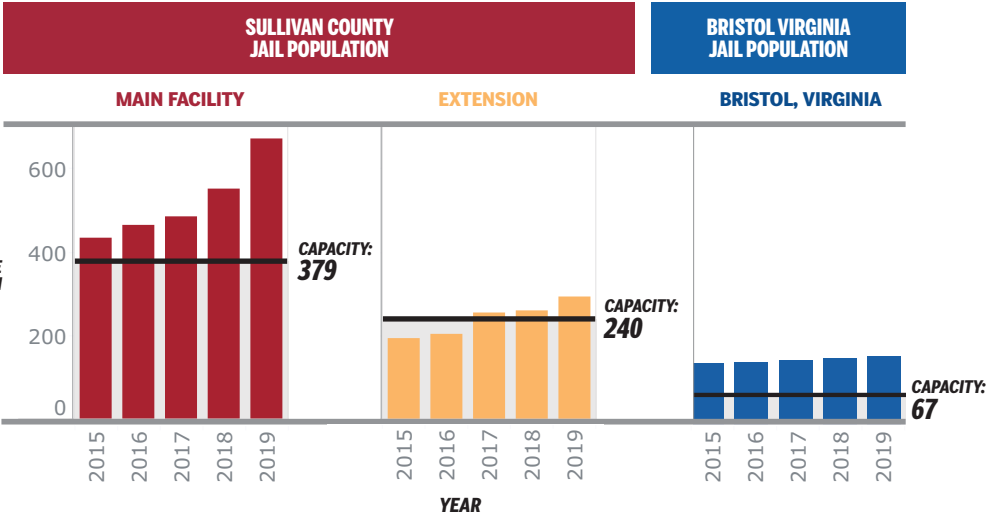
**Trusty** – An inmate who is given special privileges or responsibilities for good behavior.

**Violent crime** – The FBI classifies murder, manslaughter, rape, robbery and aggravated assault as crimes perpetrated on an individual or more than one person.

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Today and over the coming days, the Bristol Herald Courier undertakes an in-depth examination of the problems facing these two facilities, those who manage them and those who are housed there.

We will look at the impact drugs, pretrial inmates and other factors have on soaring prisoner populations, track the increases and search for some potential solutions. Along the way, the newspaper will introduce readers to some who have come through the system — both male and female — including those who've turned their lives around.



SOURCE: TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS, BRISTOL VIRGINIA SHERIFF'S OFFICE, LEIF GREISS & CHELSEA GILLENWATER/BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

# CRITICAL MASS

# Report: Pretrial inmates clogging jails nationwide

BY DAVID MCGEE  
BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

Pretrial inmates — who comprise a significant percentage of the population in this area's most overcrowded jails — those with mental illness and those unable to afford their assigned bail are the focus of a May 2019 national report urging localities to explore alternatives to building or expanding jails.

The 19-page report was issued by Prison Policy Initiatives, a Massachusetts-based nonprofit public policy think tank focused on criminal justice issues.

"It's very common today for jails to be overcrowded, because the number of people in jails nationwide has tripled in the last 30 years," report author Alexi Jones said in a written statement. "But in too many counties, jail growth is rooted in known policy failures like an overreliance on money bail. Local policymakers owe it to their constituents to find out if there is a better fix to overcrowding than just building a new or bigger jail."

The report looks at the growing number of people being held who have not been to trial, not been convicted, been convicted but not yet sentenced or who are incarcerated because they cannot afford to pay bail, fines or fees. It also explores whether localities offer treatment options for substance abuse or mental illness for those charged with crimes.

The report advocates releasing more pretrial defendants on their own recognizance and having a system to help them make court dates, requiring judges to set fines and fees based on a defendant's ability to

**MORE ONLINE**

View a copy of the Prison Policy Initiatives report at: [www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/jailexpansion.html](http://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/jailexpansion.html).

pay and investing in specialized courts for mental health or substance issues as alternatives to jail time.

"Nationally, 76% of people held by local jails are not convicted of a crime and are legally presumed innocent. While some people are incarcerated because they pose a significant safety or non-appearance risk, many are there simply because they cannot afford to pay cash bail," according to the report. "This creates a two-tiered justice system in which people who have enough money to pay cash bail are released, while poor Americans are forced to remain in jail as their case moves through the system."

### Money bail

Those who come into contact with the criminal justice system are disproportionately poor but often charged fines and fees that are impossible for them to pay, according to the PPI report.

Fines can accompany everything from municipal or traffic violations up to felony charges.

In addition to fines, people are often charged a number of fees as they move

through the court and criminal justice system, including fees for a presentencing report, public defender, electronic monitoring, pay-to-stay and supervision, it states.

Many, according to the report, simply cannot afford to pay them and, as a result, face additional fines and fees, suspension of their driver's licenses, extended supervision and incarceration.

"In some jurisdictions, as many as 20% of people in local jails are incarcerated because they could not afford to pay court-imposed fines and fees," the report states.

### Mental health, substance abuse

The PPI report also claims that 2 million people with mental illness are booked into jails each year.

"Nationally, about 15% of men and 31% of women in jails have a serious mental illness compared to 3% and 5% in the general population. And about 68% of the jail population meets medical standards for having a diagnosable substance use disorder."

The report also addresses the growing number of jail inmates who are dealing with some type of substance abuse issue.

"Research has demonstrated that access to substance use treatment can reduce both violent and financially motivated crimes in a community," according to the PPI report. "Moreover, investing in substance use treatment is estimated to yield a \$12 return for every \$1 spent, as it reduces future crime, costly incarceration, and lowers health care expenses."

## Davis

From Page A1

sisters and a little brother. The Davis family lived in a good neighborhood, and young Steven got good grades.

But then he started drinking. Booze led to pot. Then came the killer: crack cocaine. That buzzed his head with dangerous notions of invincibility.

Without his dad, a retired factory worker who died at age 67, Davis began to pattern himself after men in his community.

"Many of them sold drugs. Many of them worked a job. Many of them had multiple women," he said. "So I sampled from all of those and created my life."

That pattern shattered success, however, as Davis eventually found himself snared in the traps of 11 different jails and prisons — including an eight-month stint in the "nasty" and "deplorable" Bristol Virginia Jail, which Davis deems "the worst" place he ever spent behind bars.

### 'Sooner or later'

Davis dealt drugs. "And, sooner or later, you start using your own product," he said. "And I became my No. 1 customer."

He blew \$500 a day with a crack habit for three straight years. That amounted to about \$500,000, he figured.

"Sold it, stole it, robbed for it. It was the cycle that I was in."

Added by addiction, Davis' life cycled downward in desperation — until he was stung by surprise.

"I got robbed," he said. "And then I started robbing others."

Davis took whatever he needed.

"Crack cocaine was a quick fix," Davis said. "But robbery was the greatest high of them all."

Today, at 52, Davis contends he was not a thief.

"A thief comes in when you're not looking. A robber gives you a chance. It may not be a fair chance, but it's a chance," he said.

For Davis, robbery meant the challenge of a confrontation.

"And, many times, when you rob someone, you don't know what they're holding. You don't know what they have. Some people might be more prepared than you are. So it was like a rush."

Ultimately, that robbery rush landed Davis in jail — at age 23, just 10 years after his father died.

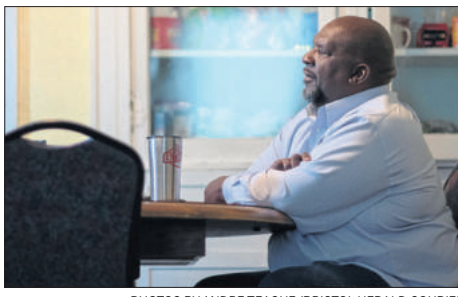
Again, he cried — the first of many times he would be locked up, serving time in Ohio.

"Because of my reputation on the street, I didn't have much problem," he said. "But I was still scared to death of being in there."

Davis got out. But he violated probation and was locked up again. And again. One more time, in 1997, was the longest — in Ohio.

"I was facing 72 years, and I ended up pulling 27 months," he said.

Along the way, he had two cocaine-induced heart attacks.



PHOTOS BY ANDRE TEAGUE/BRISTOL HERALD COURIER  
**Steven L. Davis Sr. talks about having spent time in jail and getting his life back on track.**



And the reason being is so I can better assist those who have like situations, as I once found myself. I'm able to have more empathy with individuals because I've been there and I know their struggles."

— Steven L. Davis Sr., ex-inmate who spent time in 11 jails and prisons

"And I was smoking crack each time, even when the paramedics arrived," he said. "I was still getting high."

Still, he found a spiritual light in his emotional darkness. Davis swears he heard the voice of God.

"And he says, 'You're going to preach my word.' And there were no further instructions or anything."

### New hope in Bristol

At the end of that 27-month term, in 1999, Davis came to Bristol, where his mother had relocated. And, here, in a relatively quiet community along the Tennessee-Virginia border, Davis figured he could make a new start.

"My life has been an example for my whole family," he said. "I tell them, 'You don't have to do time. I've done enough for you.'"

Coming to Bristol, Davis took on two jobs: one at a factory, another at a restaurant. And he made friends with a couple of guys who liked to split 12 packs of beer on their ride home from work.

"But, on this particular night, there was one beer left, and they couldn't figure out who drank the extra beer, so they were arguing about it," he said.

Davis said, "Gimme the beer."

The men laughed and said, "You don't drink."

But Davis drank it. And it gave him a rush. "The next thing you know, I was drinking some liquor. The next thing you know, I found some crack. The next thing you know, I'm committing a robbery. The next thing you know, I'm being incarcerated."

All that happened within 72 hours. Davis robbed a gas station in Bristol, Virginia on Dec. 12, 1999, and he was arrested on Dec. 14.

"I went to the Bristol city jail. Gosh," he said. "Terrible. Overcrowded. Plumbing problems. Just deplorable conditions in the Bristol city jail."

Davis sighed. "Just deplorable," he said again. "Freezing in the winter. Scorching hot in the summer. No ventilation. No air conditioning. Fans on the catwalk with the windows open. Not much circulation."

Davis recalled only one TV and one telephone in that jail, plus law books with missing pages.

"You sleep for the first few days until you can't sleep no more," he said. "I wanted to try to sleep this bad dream away."

### 'Know their struggles'

This wasn't a dream. It was a nightmare. And the days and nights in the Bristol Virginia Jail only marked the beginning of a sentence that would span nearly nine years.

Davis transferred to another correctional facility, then another, both in Virginia — yet many miles from Bristol.

When he was finally released on Aug. 28, 2008, he vowed to stay out of the slammer and serve God.

"I share the fact that I have a criminal record, that I was addicted to crack cocaine and that I have served 11 years in incarceration in two states," he said. "And I share with them that if God can change an old wretched man like me — worthless drug addict, less than a father, robber — then he can change anyone."

Davis now has two grown sons plus five children, ages 3 to 16, at his Bristol Virginia home, where he lives with his wife, Ann.

These days, success to him means going to work, paying his bills, getting up and doing it all over again, he said.

Davis runs a mobile car-detailing business. And he serves the Lord. For six years, he was the pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church in Lebanon, Virginia. Presently, he operates The Gray House, a men's sober living facility in Bristol, Virginia, where he provides a support system for addicts.

"I try to work with individuals and share with them that God can bring them out of a situation."

Even so, Davis sometimes still asks a question: Why did he have to go through all of this?

"And the reason being is so I can better assist those who have like situations, as I once found myself," Davis said. "I'm able to have more empathy with individuals because I've been there, and I know their struggles."

jtennis@bristolnews.com | 276-791-0709 | @BHC\_Tennis

## KEY PLAYERS

Pictured below are some of the key Sullivan County and Bristol Virginia officials and two architects who will be part of the "Critical Mass" series over the next several days. A short bio also accompanies each photo.

### Sullivan County



**Jeff Cassidy**

» Sheriff since 2018  
» Worked at Sheriff's Office from 1997-2017



**Lee Carswell**

» Chief jail administrator since 2018  
» Worked at Sheriff's Office since 1997



**Richard Venable**

» Mayor since 2014



**Barry Staubus**

» District attorney general since 2011



**Brian Dillard**

» Jail operations captain since 2018



**Melissa Copas**

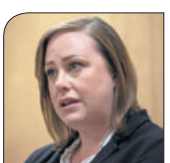
» Jail administrative captain since 2000

### Bristol, Virginia



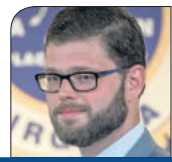
**David Maples**

» Sheriff since 2017  
» 37 years in BVS0



**Allison Arnold**

» Director of alternative sentencing programs since 2018



**Neal Osborne**

» Mayor since 2019  
» 2 years on council



**Randy Eads**

» City manager/attorney since 2016

### Architects



**John Eisenlau**

» Architect/detention planner and designer  
» TreanorHL  
» Developing a master plan to expand and/or renovate current jail and/or build new jail



**Jay Henderlight**

» Architect  
» Michael Brady Inc.  
» Developing a master plan to expand and/or renovate current jail and/or build a new jail

## QUICK FACT

**On Aug. 31, 2019, Sullivan's main jail held 746 prisoners, 196.8% of its rated capacity of 379 beds.**

Source: Tennessee Corrections Institute

“I think the answer to civil disorder in America, the answer to police problems in America, the answer to jail overcrowding and all the problems that we see is — the one answer is that government must go back to its people.”

— Janet Reno (1938–2016), American lawyer who served as the attorney general of the United States from 1993 until 2001; she was the first woman and the second-longest serving attorney general in U.S. history, after William Wirt

## Our View

# Why we did ‘Critical Mass’ jail project

Year after year, the Bristol Herald Courier has published articles about two local governments — Sullivan County and Bristol, Virginia — grappling with the sticky problem of jail overcrowding.

For the last five years, Sullivan County officials have lived with the specter of possible decertification of their jail facilities. In recent months, the population has exceeded 1,000, nearly 400 more than their capacity.

The main jail was built 32 years ago and has been overcrowded since, though beds have been added over the years and an “extension” opened.

Bristol, Virginia’s lockup was built nearly 50 years ago. Although the jail’s capacity is 67, it typically has 150-160 prisoners and an additional 50-60 are housed at the Southwest Virginia Regional Jail in Abingdon.

Although we bring our readers the daily news about jail overcrowding, we wanted to undertake an intensive examination of the problem and how it affects our communities and readers.

Over the next week, we will deliver a special report titled “Critical Mass” that is the result of eight months of investigation and hard work by reporters, photographers and editors. Between today and next Sunday, we will feature 24 stories, dozens of photos, a number of colorful graphics, videos and podcasts, all aimed at helping you understand the magnitude of the issue.

We will take you inside the jails, where we talked about the living conditions with inmates — many who sleep on mats on the floor. We will bring you personal stories of people who’ve spent years in and out of a number of jails and local residents who land in jail due to a drug habit.

We will explore the dangers of overcrowding. In Sullivan County, the high number of inmates combined with the jail’s linear design increases the threat for inmates and officers, who put their lives on the line every day. Inmate-on-inmate violence and assaults of officers are common.

And we will look at possible solutions and tell you what happens next in both localities.

Our thanks go to Sullivan County Sheriff Jeff Cassidy and Bristol Virginia Sheriff David Maples, without whom we couldn’t have completed this project. Each sheriff visited the newspaper and answered a lot of tough questions. They granted us unprecedented access — for this newspaper — to the jails, and our cameras were allowed inside.

For the first time, the Herald Courier will conduct a town hall, in conjunction with this project. Many of the voices in these stories are scheduled to answer questions, including Maples, Sullivan County District Attorney General Barry Staubus and Bristol Virginia City Manager Randy Eads. It will be held at 7 p.m. Wednesday, Oct. 9, at the old Sullivan County Courthouse in Blountville. We hope you’ll participate. If you can’t be there, the newspaper will stream it live on its Facebook page.

The subject is timely. In the last few months, Sullivan County hired architects to come up with a master plan for the jail’s future and that plan could go to the County Commission in November.

Three times, Bristol Virginia officials have considered — and decided against — joining the Southwest Virginia Regional Jail. Although the city shelled out more than \$600,000 in the last fiscal year just to house its 50-60 excess inmates at the regional jail, it turns out that’s cheaper than closing the city jail and joining the authority.

At the same time, the two local governments have another reality in common: tight finances and the need to replace aging, outdated school buildings.

As it turns out, however, even if both local governments had the money, what has become increasingly clear — to them and to us — is the answer isn’t as simple as adding beds through renovation or a new facility.

Since the sheriffs estimate that 75%-85% of inmates are there because of drugs, rehabilitation treatment is needed along with vocational and life skills training to help ensure inmates who do get out don’t return. The overcrowded facilities, however, make this more difficult because there’s nowhere to hold the classes.

The city and county each also have other programs — alternative sentencing and drug courts — though, so far, they’re not making a noticeable difference in the number of inmates.

And something needs to be done about the high number of pretrial and mentally ill inmates that flood the jails.

Clearly, there are no simple solutions. But solutions must be found — soon.

So, why should you care?

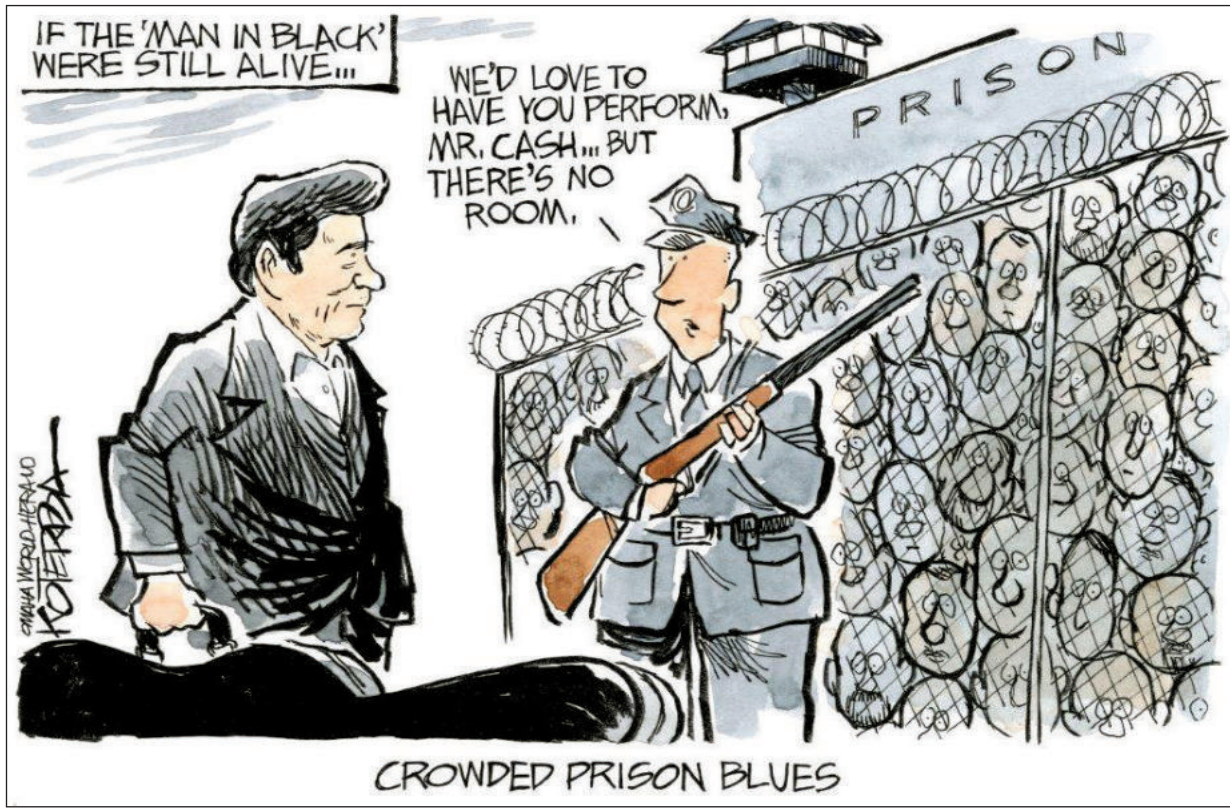
As I edited the stories over the last month, I was struck by this thought: Both overcrowded jails are a disaster waiting to happen — be it a serious injury or death of a guard, a riot or even an escape that could threaten the community. Or there could be a multimillion-dollar lawsuit filed by inmates whose constitutional rights are being violated, as Sullivan County’s sheriff recently warned.

And, simply put, you’re paying for it. If Sullivan County officials decide to build a jail at an estimated cost of \$110 million, it would cost each county resident nearly \$700, while the cost per household would be \$1,656.

And one more thing. It’s not inconceivable that some member of your family, or mine, might develop a drug problem and wind up in one of the local jails. Or maybe you will be accused of a crime you didn’t commit.

As remote as the possibility may seem, one of your loved ones — or even you — might end up in a jail cell teeming with angry, uncomfortable inmates and sleeping on a mat on the floor next to the toilet.

— City Editor Susan Cameron



JEFF KOTERBA / OMAHA WORLD HERALD, NEBRASKA

## Your View

### Reader no longer concerned with others who disagree

It dawned on me this morning that I am sometimes consumed in trying to change peoples' minds. I've come to the conclusion that I am wasting my time. It could be about racism, reparations, illegal immigration, the building of a border wall, pro-life versus abortion, socialism versus capitalism, women's rights, climate change, the minimum wage, gun control, free speech, the right to change your gender, to demand the use of pronouns when I acknowledge your presence, the list goes on and on. I think to myself how can so few totally disagree with everything that I believe in. Well, today's the day where I no longer will debate, banter back and forth or

get involved with communicating with others that totally disagree with me on every issue.

I think to myself, what is going on in the minds of these people. Well, I no longer will even entertain that thought. It is what it is and it is bigger than me. If it has anything to do with the hatred for President Trump and the love for Obama or Hillary, or the Democratic Party, your day will soon come and all of your wishes will come true. If Elizabeth Warren wins, all of us common people will be on the same page. Your seven acres and my three acres will soon be equalized to five acres apiece. And as time goes by we both might have to give a little more for those in need.

**Ken Spangler**  
Blountville, Tennessee

### Giving your view

The Your View column is an open forum for readers to share civil discussion on matters of public interest.

- » Letters must be original works; 300 words or less.
- » Letters will be edited, and the publisher reserves the right to reject any submission.
- » Writers will be limited to one letter a month.
- » Submissions must include the writer's name, full address and telephone number.
- » Send letters to: Letters to the Editor, Bristol Herald Courier, P.O. Box 609, Bristol VA 24203; fax to 276-669-3696; or email to letters@bristolnews.com. Letters can also be submitted through our website, HeraldCourier.com.

# BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

**Jim Maxwell,**  
jmaxwell@bristolnews.com

**Publisher**  
@BHCpublisher

**Editor's note:** Opinions expressed do not necessarily represent those of this newspaper staff and management. In support of the First Amendment right of free speech, the Opinion page offers opportunity for diverse, civil discussion on topics of public interest. Guest opinions are accepted on a limited basis and the publisher reserves the right to reject any submission.

## Biden finally gave the speech he needed to

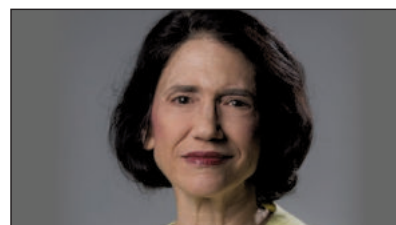
Ever since President Donald Trump was caught trying to solicit help from Ukraine to help his reelection campaign, I have been waiting for former vice president Joe Biden to go on offense. Aside from a fiery retort to a reporter asking about his and his son's actions in Ukraine, Biden has let Congress and Trump have the floor. That has not worked to Biden's advantage, and his lead over the field has slowly shrunk.

On Wednesday, Biden finally responded in a Reno, Nevada, speech with a full-throated attack on Trump. He made clear Trump is not going to intimidate him or his family. ("He is repeatedly smearing me and my family. His party fans out to carry the smear. Millions of dollars in dishonest attack ads are blanketing the airwaves — paid for by the special interests so well served by his presidency," he said. "Let me make something clear to Trump and his hatchet men and the special interests funding his attacks against me — I'm not going anywhere.") He then appropriately pivoted to Trump, pointing out that Trump's impeachment inquiry is about what Trump said and did.

Biden declared: "It's not about Donald Trump's antics. It's about what has brought Donald Trump, and the nation, to this sobering moment in our history — and to the choice facing us in 2020. What has brought us here is simply this: the abuse of power." Putting Trump's private interests above the country's, Biden argued, is what Trump's presidency is all about. "I'm not surprised Donald Trump asked a foreign government for the help to beat me. I'm not surprised the NRA met with Trump to prop him up," he said. "And I'm not surprised Trump's special-interest friends are spending millions to attack me."

He explained what he should have when the story first broke:

"We weren't pressing Ukraine to get rid of a tough prosecutor. We were pressing them to replace a weak prosecutor who wouldn't do his job with someone who, at the time, we hoped would finally crack down on corruption.



**Jennifer Rubin**

"Trump, on the other hand, was secretly putting at risk our national security to pursue a personal political vendetta against me because he does not want to run against me.

"And what is truly stunning about this are the exhortations involved in holding back desperately needed military assistance and political support from our Ukrainian friends while they are engaged in a live war with the Russians — a war that has cost thousands of Ukrainian lives."

Biden would do well to keep repeating this message. He can also provide some necessary detail.

First, Biden should make clear Trump is once again taking Russian President Vladimir Putin's side against the United States. Either from Putin or from one of his useful idiots in the right-wing media, Trump has gotten the idea that Ukraine, not Russia, was behind the 2016 election interference. That makes him once more (still) Russia's ally in sowing confusion about the events of 2016. That is also how he tries to justify his foot-dragging on threats to our election security, and puts at risk allies who are the victims of Russian aggression. Quite simply, Trump is a Putin patsy, disloyal to the United States, or both. Biden should say so, arguing that this makes Trump dangerously unfit for the presidency.

Second, the last thing Trump cares about is fighting corruption. His personal emissary Rudy Giuliani is one of many influence-peddlers trying to cozy up to anti-democratic actors in Ukraine to make a buck. Nothing more clearly captures the degree to which

Trump and his cronies contribute to foreign corruption than Giuliani consulting imprisoned ex-campaign chairman Paul Manafort about Ukraine. Trump's ongoing financial self-dealing, wooing of foreign money and family conflicts of interest (recall Jared Kushner and Ivanka Trump have been conducting business while working in the White House) is one reason that Trump so admires foreign autocrats. They bond over graft. This also would be yet another reason to throw Trump out of office as soon as possible.

Third, Biden would do well to emphasize that Trump did not hire the best people. Trump hired pliable enablers and co-conspirators such as Attorney General William Barr and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who now spend their time trying to interfere with the investigation and carrying out Trump's private political agenda. Biden should make clear that anyone who participated in an illegal conspiracy and coverup will be held accountable to the extent the facts and law warrant. Biden might want to suggest that all government employees with information relevant to the impeachment inquiry step forward now, for the sake of the country and their own careers.

In sum, Biden took a good first step with his Wednesday speech, but he now must lean into attacks on Trump's abuse of power and attendant clueless foreign policy (spoon-fed to him by Putin) and crony-filled administration. Offering himself as the candidate whom Trump is most scared of and who is best-equipped to undo the damage Trump has wrought might be just the message Biden needs to regain momentum.

Jennifer Rubin writes reported opinion for The Washington Post.

### EDITOR'S NOTE

» Susan Cameron's regular column, "Roses & Thorns," is scheduled to return in a few weeks.

Local farm features corn maze in shape of U.S.



**AGRICULTURE » A8**

Larson takes NASCAR playoff win at Dover



**SPORTS » B1**

# BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

MONDAY, October 7, 2019

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**Second Trump Whistleblower**

## Scandal deepens with new revelation

BY ERIC TUCKER, RICHARD LARDNER and JILL COLVIN  
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A second whistleblower has come forward with information about President Donald Trump's dealings with Ukraine, adding to the impeachment peril engulfing the White House and potentially providing new leads to Democrats in their unfurling investigation of Trump's conduct.

Attorney Mark Zaid, who represents both whistleblowers, said the second person has spoken to the intelligence community's internal watchdog and can corroborate information in the original whistleblower complaint. That document alleged that Trump pushed Ukraine's president to investigate Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden's family, prompting a White House cover-up. Crucially, the new whistleblower works in the intelligence field and has "firsthand knowledge" of key events, Zaid said.

The emergence of the second whistleblower threatened to undermine arguments from Trump and his allies to discredit the original complaint. They have called it politically motivated, claimed it was filed improperly and dismissed it as unreliable because it was based on secondhand or third-hand information.

A rough transcript of Trump's call with Ukrainian President

See **SCANDAL**, Page A5

**INSIDE**



**4 killed, 5 hurt in bar shooting in Kansas » A5**

Thank you, **G.F. Austin**, for subscribing to the Bristol Herald Courier.



Weather » A10



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## SPECIAL REPORT DAY 2

# 'Lethal cocktail'

Sullivan County jail overcrowding creates danger for inmates, officers



A female inmate sleeps in a plastic "boat" on the floor between two bunk beds at the Sullivan County jail. Because there aren't enough bunks, many inmates sleep on mats on the floor or on plastic makeshift beds with thin mattresses known as "boats." Their heads rest next to toilets. Some inmates said during a visit to the main jail in July that they don't even get a mat to sleep on.

BY LURAH SPELL | BRISTOL HERALD COURIER



## CRITICAL MASS

Unlocking the factors behind the jail overcrowding problem in Sullivan County and Bristol, Va.

**B**LOUNTVILLE, Tenn. — One Sullivan County jail official recently described the overcrowded jail facilities as a "lethal cocktail."

The population continues to rise, with cells holding triple their capacity and its linear design causes serious safety issues for inmates and corrections officers. Many inmates develop a "mob mentality" that only increases the danger, said Jail Operations Capt. Brian Dillard.

The main jail has been overcrowded almost since it opened in 1987. In 1999, 150 beds were added, and a separate building, called the "extension," opened in 2006 to house 240 inmates. The combined capacity of both facilities is 619, which is regularly exceeded by nearly 400 inmates.

The average combined inmate population is now more than 1,000.

See **LETHAL**, Page A6

**"**This is the worst lethal cocktail we could possibly imagine. I've worked in Los Angeles, and I've seen a lot of facilities across the country, and I'll be honest with you — I've not seen anything this decrepit."

— Capt. Brian Dillard, Sullivan County jail operations

**INSIDE**

- » Report reveals details of assault on former officer **A6**
- » Sullivan County jail's past still present in design **A7**

**ONLINE**

- At **HeraldCourier.com**:
- » Day 1 stories in this series
- » Video: Officials, former Sullivan inmates talk about overcrowding and its effects
- » Photo gallery

**COMING TUESDAY**

We talk to Sullivan County inmates about living conditions in overcrowded jail

**TOWN HALL**

7 p.m. Oct. 9  
Old Sullivan County Courthouse  
Second-floor conference room



INSIDE: CLASSIFIED B8-10 | COMICS B6 | DEATHS A4-5 | OPINION A9 | SCOREBOARD B2 | TELEVISION B7



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# CRITICAL MASS

## Report reveals details of assault on former officer

BY LURAH SPELL  
BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

BLOUNTVILLE, Tenn. — One recent example of the dangers of working in the Sullivan County jail was an assault on former Corrections Officer Brett Peters, who “got the crap beat out of him,” according to Sheriff Jeff Cassidy.

“Sometimes, we might have two in a week; sometimes we could go a couple weeks without having any,” Cassidy said of assaults on officers. “Brett Peters — he had to have stitches in his lip. He was just trying to break up a fight, and he got the crap beat out of him.”

On July 31 at 10:25 p.m., three officers, including Peters, responded to a disturbance in a men’s cell in a general population unit, according to an incident report written by William Gragg, one of the responding officers. The officers told inmates to sit down, and inmate Alex Beaver, 23, shouted that officers should “not be coming up in here” yelling, the report states.

**MORE ONLINE**  
View a copy of the incident report at [HeraldCourier.com](http://HeraldCourier.com).

Peters, 23, took Beaver’s arm to escort him out of the cell to “deescalate the situation,” but Beaver jerked his arm away and struck Peters in the face with a closed fist, which injured his lip and required three stitches, according to the report.

Peters then “wrapped Beaver up and completed a controlled take down to the ground in order to regain control of the inmate,” the report states.

“At that time multiple inmates began surrounding myself and Officer Peters, in which I began giving verbal commands to back up,” Gragg wrote in the report. “After several attempts with verbal commands having no influence on inmates I reached down

and took a hold of Officer Peters and picked him up in order to remove ourselves from the dangerous situation at hand.”

Many of the cells in Sullivan County’s two jail facilities are overcrowded and house double or triple the number of inmates they’re designed to hold. At times, as many as 50 people are housed in one cell.

The report doesn’t state how many were in the cell during the July 31 disturbance. Capt. Andy Seabolt said it isn’t possible to keep a record of how many inmates are in each cell every day.

“There have been numerous assaults that resulted in injuries,” Seabolt said of the jail facilities. “Most are minor. However, Capt. Dillard explained to me that there have been inmates that have had to have broken bones set and, rarely, surgery on various injuries.”

Beaver wasn’t injured and refused medical treatment, according to the report.

It was the first time Peters was assaulted in the jail, according to Seabolt.

Peters was a corrections officer in the jail for about three years, and he’s now a Kingsport Police Department officer. He would not discuss the attack with the Bristol Herald Courier.

Peters provided the following written response:

“I am going to respectfully decline your request for an interview. I am no longer employed with the Sullivan County Sheriff’s Office and have begun new employment with a neighboring jurisdiction. As such, I feel it would be inappropriate for me to publicly discuss the matter. ...”

Peters had already turned in his resignation before the assault, Cassidy said.

It’s more common for inmates to assault each other than to assault officers, but two officers were assaulted during one week in August, the sheriff said.

Beaver is still incarcerated at the Sullivan County jail on violation of probation and violation of community corrections charges.

In the report, assault, physically resisting, threatening an employee, creating a disturbance and disobeying a lawful order of a staff member are listed as “rule violations.” Those are considered “in-house” charges, according to Seabolt.

“Those are what are used for the disciplinary board that is held in-house,” he said. “There is actually a criminal case that is being investigated on this incident that will most likely result in charges being filed.”

The Sheriff’s Office corrections investigator completed an investigation and found Peters’ use of force was justified, according to the report.

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## Lethal

From Page A1

Since 2014, the jail has faced the possibility of decertification due to overcrowding, and county Sheriff Jeff Cassidy recently warned the County Commission that the living conditions are violating the constitutional rights of inmates.

“This is the worst lethal cocktail we could possibly imagine,” Dillard said. “I’ve worked in Los Angeles, and I’ve seen a lot of facilities across the country, and I’ll be honest with you — I’ve not seen anything this decrepit. ...”

He complimented the staff, saying corrections officers hold the jail together.

“I have no idea how they wake up in the morning, make the decision to come in here and take the abuse they have to for the money they make and complete that job,” he added.

### A look inside

Cells vary in size and shape. Some are large rooms behind one door with a small window. Officers can open the door, but there’s no way to get a good look inside, and the window can easily be blocked by inmates. The others look like traditional cells — steel bars that inmates can stick their limbs through.

Most cells are designed to hold 16-28 inmates, though it’s common for 30-40, and sometimes 50, to be housed in one. If an officer has to go into the cell, they can be ambushed by all of the inmates because there’s no way to separate them in small groups behind more than one door.

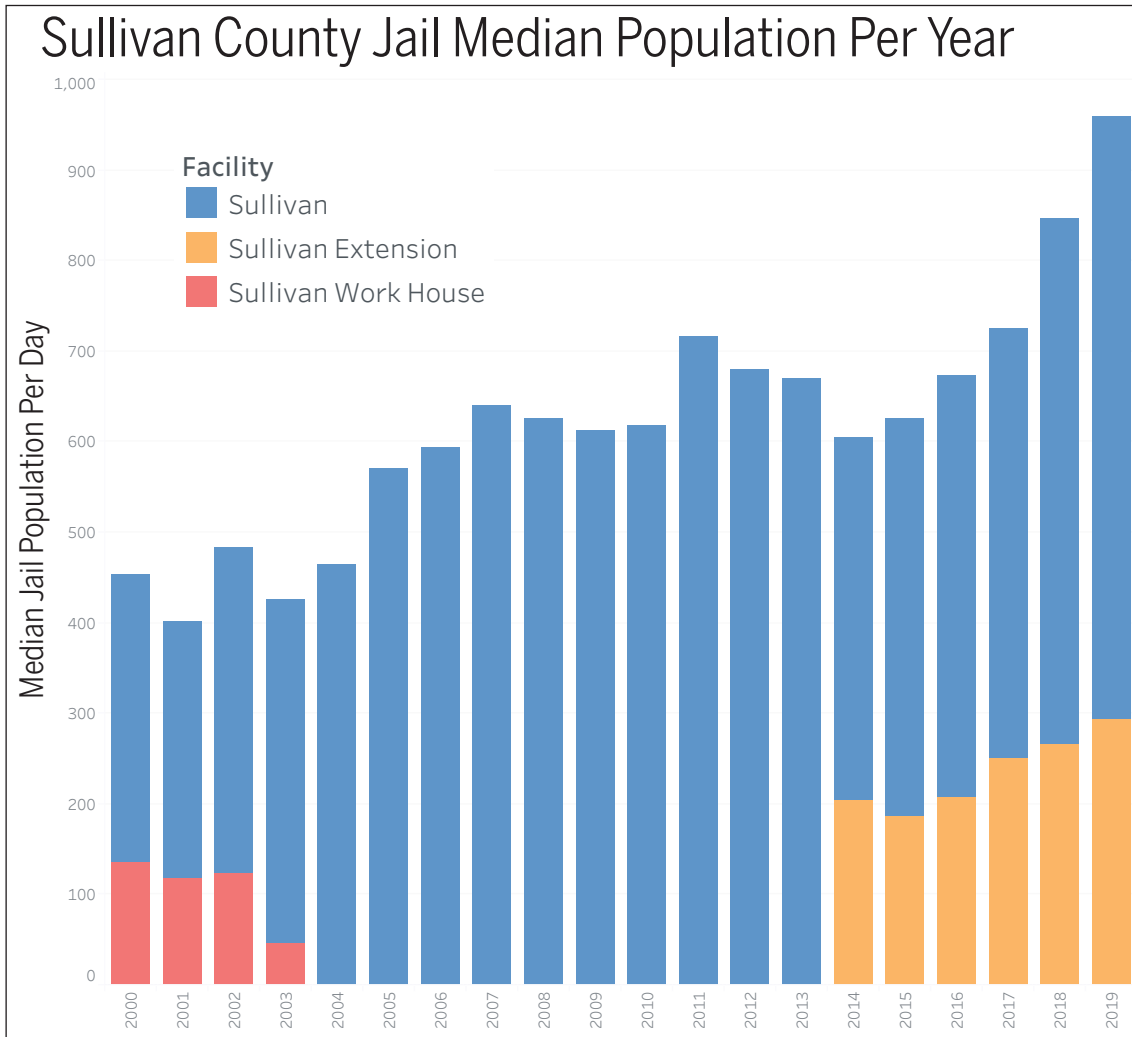


TABLEAU GRAPHIC BY LEIF GREISS/BRISTOL HERALD COURIER. SOURCE: TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION

Because there aren’t enough bunks, many inmates sleep on mats on the floor or on plastic, makeshift beds with thin mattresses known as “boats.” Their heads rest next to toilets. Some inmates said during a visit to the main jail in July that they don’t even get a mat to sleep on.

“You’re not just double-bunking — you’re triple-bunking in some circumstances,” Dillard said.

In the heat of summer, the HVAC units continually break down. Large fans are used to try to keep inmates somewhat cool. Mold can be seen growing in cells.

### Safety issues from the beginning

The linear design of the main jail and the extension causes supervision and safety problems.

When the main jail was built, the linear design was already decreasing in favor of pod systems, which allow more inmate control.

Typically, two inmates are housed in each cell rather than dozens in large dormitory-style cells, according to Chief Jail Administrator Lee Carswell.

The current design results in blind spots and mazelike hall-

ways. There are cameras in each cell, though inmates can cover them, and in the halls, but only a few officers monitor the cameras — one at the main jail and two at the extension.

With a new jail or expansion, inmates would no longer be able to cover the cameras.

“Once you’ve kind of been given a facility, you’re stuck with it unless you have new construction,” Carswell said. “... The only way you can fix this problem is to design a building that’s like a podular-type system. And we need some areas [for programs]. It’s almost like we’ve got to fix that first before we can really go full-blown into these reentry style programs because, right now, we lack the space.”

To monitor inmates, spot contraband or stop fights, officers have to walk the halls, but there aren’t enough on each shift to regularly or safely do that. Even when an officer witnesses a fight, they have to wait for backup before entering the cells, or risk getting hurt. There’s still a risk when other officers are there because the inmates, according to Jail Administrative Capt. Melissa Copas, have become more violent overall.

“They’re younger. They really just don’t care,” Copas said. “They’d slap their mama quicker than they would slap me. They just have no respect. So, it’s a whole different environment and the drugs are different, too, especially from when I started.”

Inmate psychology 101 is to have a “mob mentality,” Dillard said.

See **JAIL**, Page A7

## BY THE NUMBERS

To read excerpts from use-of-force reports, go to [HeraldCourier.com](http://HeraldCourier.com).



A set of handcuffs is attached to a bench in the intake area of the Sullivan County Jail.

From January 2018 through June of this year, inmate population steadily climbed, with the exception of one month, from less than **600** male inmates to hover around **700**. In April, that number reached a high of **753**, according to Tennessee Department of Correction data. Ten months out of the same 15-month period, the female population nearly reached or exceeded **226** and twice climbed to more than **270**.

Most cells are designed to hold **16-28** inmates, though it’s common for **30-40**, and sometimes **50**, to be housed in one.

Chief Jail Administrator Lee Carswell said there should be **150-170** segregation cells to adequately serve the needs of the average jail population, but there are only about **20** between the two facilities.

There are around **30** inmate-on-inmate assaults each month, according to Chief Jail Administrator Lee Carswell. On some nights and weekends, **several** occur. In July, Jail Operations Capt. Brian Dillard said there were **nine** assaults in one night.

By 2026, there will be a need for **226** female inmate beds and **755** male beds for a combined total of **981** beds. That projection was surpassed earlier this year.

Sources: 2016 needs assessment report; Tennessee Department of Corrections data; Sullivan County jail officials. Photo by Andre Teague/Bristol Herald Courier. Graphic by Sandy Ross/Bristol Herald Courier

# CRITICAL MASS

# Jail's past still present in design

BY LURAH SPELL  
BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

BLOUNTVILLE, Tenn. — Stepping into the old Sullivan County jail in the basement of the county courthouse in Blountville is like experiencing déjà vu because its setup is so similar to the current facilities.

The jail housed inmates for more than 30 years until the Sullivan County Justice Center, which houses the current main jail facility, opened in 1987. The old cells are now used to store records from county departments.

Sheriff's Office Capt. Bruce Bullis recently took the Bristol Herald Courier on a tour of the old jail. He was hired by the department to work in the jail in January 1983 and worked there for nine months.

There were eight cells upstairs and two downstairs, a dumbwaiter and kitchen. Today, the county's print shop and central receiving office are housed where the kitchen and two cells — one for women and one for trustees — used to be. Juveniles were also housed there.

The dumbwaiter — used to send trays of food — also remains.

The "tank," or a cell where inmates were kept separate from others to "deescalate or sober up," Bullis said, was downstairs, and there was only one. The visitation area for inmates' families, a lobby, the dispatch center, former Sheriff Mike Gardner's office and the Records Division were also downstairs.

Because the jail entrance was on the side of the courthouse, inmates were unloaded from vehicles and walked inside the jail from the parking lot near the public.

The "Old Sheriff's Home," which has since been renovated and



ANDRE TEAGUE/BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

**Bruce Bullis of the Sullivan County Sheriff's Office points out the bunks inside the cells of the old county jail in Blountville that is currently used for storage. To abide by a July 2, 1986, federal order, the county closed that jail. The order followed the filing of a June 25 class-action lawsuit by inmates who claimed the jail conditions were inhumane and caused needless punishment, which successfully challenged the constitutionality of confinement conditions, according to Bristol Herald Courier archives.**

renamed the Heritage Tourism Information Center, had about 30 cells and was used as a work release area for inmates, Bullis said. Inmates were let out of jail to work during the day. Deputies sat outside and guarded it.

The "Old Sheriff's Home" was built in 1868 and had one jail cell, according to Shelia Hunt, Sullivan County's Department of Archives and Tourism executive director.

"By 1920, a newer jail had been built on a rise behind the courthouse," she said. "This jail was a Georgian structure that sat within just a few feet of the Old Sheriff's Home. By the 1950s, jail conditions were considered atrocious, and a new jail was built in the form of a wing on the back of

the present-day Sullivan County Courthouse. This new jail was opened in 1956."

To abide by a July 2, 1986, federal order, the county closed that jail. The order followed the filing of a June 25 class-action lawsuit by inmates who claimed the jail conditions were inhumane and caused needless punishment, which successfully challenged the constitutionality of confinement conditions, according to Bristol Herald Courier archives.

The order gave the county 180 days to reduce inmate population by 65-75 inmates and 90 days to reduce the population to 100.

A minimum security annex was built to temporarily house inmates while the new jail — the

current main jail — was built. It was meant to temporarily house inmates until the new jail opened, but inmates were still housed there after the new jail opened. That building closed several years ago because of security breaches, according to Sullivan County Sheriff Jeff Cassidy and Chief Jail Administrator Lee Carswell.

Cassidy, Carswell, county commissioners and others have been saying for months — and others, including former Sheriff Wayne Anderson, have said for years — that the current jail is understaffed. That was a problem with the old jail, too, Bullis said. There were 60 inmates, on average, when he started working there, and by the time he left to go to the

## JAIL TIMELINE

### 1920

By this year, "a newer jail had been built on a rise behind the courthouse," according to Shelia Hunt, Sullivan County's Department of Archives and Tourism executive director

### 1956

By the 1950s, jail conditions were considered atrocious, and a new jail was built in the form of a wing on the back of the present-day Sullivan County Courthouse. This new jail was opened in 1956, according to Hunt.

### 1987

Current main Sullivan County jail facility opens.

police academy there was an average of 80 inmates, he said.

"It was overcrowded then, and that's what brought the federal lawsuit," Bullis said. "...It's the same design, which is pitiful — way outdated."

When Bullis worked at the old jail, a 12-by-12-foot "exercise yard," or outdoor recreation area, was made by cutting a hole in the wall, installing a door and building a fence around the area, Bullis said.

"When they had them out there, an officer had to take a shotgun and go upstairs ... and come out the window and sit out there and watch them on the roof with a shotgun," he said. "It just brings back memories of stuff you see on Mayberry. It's funny now, but that stuff happened."

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## Jail

From Page A6

There are around 30 inmate-on-inmate assaults each month, according to Carswell. On some nights and weekends, several occur. In July, Dillard said there were nine assaults in one night.

The number of corrections officers assaulted by inmates varies. Sometimes, there are none, and sometimes there are a couple in a week, Cassidy said.

Copas and Dillard said the extension is more violent because of the piecemeal way it's built, but also because younger inmates, who are charged with less serious crimes, are housed there, and they aren't used to living behind bars.

At the extension, there is no outdoor security perimeter — no razor wire fencing to keep inmates in if they get out, or to keep them there during an evacuation. If there is a fire or any emergency that warrants an evacuation, officers would have to free inmates and try to arrest them later, according to Dillard. One exit out of the extension overlooks the Sullivan County Animal Shelter, the woods and a nearby neighborhood.

"We've requested security fence," Copas said. "... The [inmates'] family — they can walk right up here. They have access right close to our inmates. They have windows. At night, our officers (are) having to do security checks out here. It's dangerous. ... We've had them dig out before."

In the event of an evacuation, there is steel fencing and some razor wire outside the main jail's two enclosed yards, but if 1,000 inmates had to be let out all at once, they could push the fencing down, Cassidy said.

### Possible decertification

The jail facilities have faced decertification by the Tennessee Corrections Institute since 2014 due to inmate overcrowding.

The group is tasked with holding jail facilities accountable to hundreds of standards it sets. TCI Deputy Director William Wall



DAVID CRIGGER/BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

**The personal items of the inmates at the Sullivan County jail are bagged and secured while they are in the jail. Since 2014, the jail has faced the possibility of decertification due to overcrowding. Sheriff Jeff Cassidy recently warned the County Commission that the living conditions are violating the constitutional rights of inmates.**

said razor wire fencing isn't required at Tennessee jails.

"Facilities are commonly built with internal security perimeters," he said.

The extension was built to be a "workhouse," meaning it was supposed to house sentenced, minimum-security inmates, but due to overcrowding, that isn't always the case.

Jail officials say there is no way to classify inmates — to separate "predator from prey," as Dillard put it, and that's been the case for years.

"We've got everything that any prison would have, too, as far as a violent act," Carswell said. "The inability to separate like we should is becoming a big challenge for me. We had 116 assaults from October to December in our county jail, and that's broke bones, that's head injuries ... and mainly it's because of the current design of the jail. ... It's a long, linear design that you don't see a lot of jails designed the way ours is."

From January 2018 through June of this year, inmate population steadily climbed, with the exception of one month, from less than 600 male inmates to hover around 700. In April, that number reached a high of 753, according to Tennessee Department of Correction data. Ten months out of the same 15-month period, the female population nearly reached or exceeded 226 and twice climbed to more than 270.

As of July, there were 250 women out of 967 inmates in Sullivan County jail, according to data gathered by Michael Brady Inc., or MBI, and TreanorHL. The firms are designing a master plan to renovate and/or expand the facilities or build a new jail. Based on those numbers, women make up 25.9% of the jail's population.

"It's a whole entity for you," he said.

### More than a jail

The main jail also serves as a mental health institute and nursing home, of sorts, but without the usual accommodations of either. One unit had to be converted into what Carswell likened to a nursing home because inmates with walkers, wheelchairs, prosthetics and oxygen are incarcerated there. There are people with serious mental illnesses, cancer, dementia and Alzheimer's disease behind bars.

Smaller segregation cells, known as "tanks," are meant for three uses: to discipline inmates by keeping them out of the general population; to keep those who come in drunk or high separate until they're sober; or to serve as suicide watch cells — where those who may take their lives are kept nearly naked for their own safety.

But there aren't enough tanks. Carswell said there should be 150-170 segregation cells to adequately serve the needs of the

## ONLINE POLL

**What do you think is the answer to local jail overcrowding? Answer our poll question at HeraldCourier.com.**

average jail population, but there are only about 20 between the two facilities.

As of July, 66% of the population was pretrial inmates, meaning they hadn't been convicted of a crime.

"Our inmate population is violent — most of them," Cassidy said.

### Staffing

Carswell, Cassidy, Dillard and Copas all say there aren't enough corrections officers and medical staff to handle the number of inmates. On average, 19 officers work each shift, and they've worked thousands of overtime hours this year alone.

Transports of inmates to and from other states, to court in Bristol and Kingsport and to doctors' appointments means transport officers are always on the move, and there aren't enough of them.

There are two registered nurses — one is the jail's health administrator, and one spends all her time performing state-mandated physicals on inmates — 10 licensed practical nurses, a mental health coordinator and a medical clerk. The LPNs, two on each shift, give medication to 300 inmates per shift along with dealing with emergencies and injuries.

In July, the County Commission funded an additional 10 positions after months of debate that centered on cost, need and negotiations. The original request from Carswell and Cassidy was for 32 positions.

One LPN, one transport officer and eight corrections officer positions have since been hired, according to Cassidy.

Eva Jessee, a county resident and mother of two corrections officers who work in the jail, pleaded with the commission twice earlier this year for more officers. Her son-in-law also works in the jail.

"The jail is an incredibly dangerous environment," she said. "I worry when my kids walk out the door every single day whether they're going to come home safely or not. I've been called in the middle of the night for a child that's been in the emergency room. I've had a child that got hurt in the middle of the night and refused to leave until the next morning because he couldn't leave his shift short-staffed."

Former Corrections Officer Hunter White, who worked at the jail for about a year, described his job as "tough" some of the time.

"You've got a lot of them that will just ask you questions and try to cause problems, and most of the time they know they're here, what they're on and so on — they know how much time they've got, and they don't want to screw that up," he said. "And then you've got the ones that like to start trouble. It makes your shift extra long."

A lot of paperwork and consistently checking on inmates who have threatened to kill themselves every 15-30 minutes also adds to the stress, White said. Typically, he works with one other officer on each 12-hour shift, and they're responsible for hundreds of inmates.

"It's a struggle because of where there's so many," he said. "We have two cells that have 41 people. So, we have a total of about 317 people up here for just two officers."

The design of the jail proves challenging for him and his fellow officers.

"If something happens all the way at the very end in Alpha cell [at the end of the hall], by the time we get there, it's already done, so we don't know what happened," White said. "The only thing we know is if we see it on camera. We can't hear what's going on all the way down there unless we're walking by. If we're going that way [and] we hear something, then maybe we can catch it, but if not, then it's already done and over with."

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Bristol, Virginia claims BVU owes \$70K in trash fees

REGION » A3

Cardinals clip Braves in 10th

SPORTS » B1



# BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

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## Trump sends conflicting signals on Syria, Turkey

BY LITA C. BALDOR, MATTHEW LEE and ROBERT BURNS  
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Facing unusually wide criticism, President Donald Trump sent out strong but conflicting signals on the “endless war” in Syria and Middle East on Monday. He declared U.S. troops would step aside for an expected Turkish attack on Kurds who have fought alongside Americans for years but then threatened to destroy the Turks’ economy if they went too far.

Even Trump’s staunchest Republican allies expressed outrage at the prospect of abandoning Syrian Kurds who had fought the Islamic State group with U.S. troops. Trump’s decision appeared to be the latest example of an approach to foreign policy that critics condemn as impulsive, that is sometimes reversed and frequently is untethered to the advice of his national security aides.

“A catastrophic mistake,” said Rep. Liz Cheney of Wyoming, the No. 3 House Republican leader. “Shot in the arm to the bad guys,” said Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina.

Pentagon and State Department officials held out the possibility of persuading Turkey to abandon its expected invasion.

In recent weeks, the U.S. and Turkey had reached an apparent accommodation of Turkish concerns about the presence of Kurdish fighters, seen in Turkey as a threat. American and Turkish soldiers had been conducting joint patrols in a zone along the border. As part of that

See SYRIA, Page A10

### INSIDE

**Ballad task force chair — Del. Todd Pillion — challenges medical group’s leaders » A3**

Thank you, **H.B. Ellis Jr.**, for subscribing to the Bristol Herald Courier.

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Weather » A10



## SPECIAL REPORT DAY 3

# ‘Catching no breaks’

### Sullivan County jail struggles to provide enough space for inmates



ANDRE TEAGUE/BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

Inmates in the Sullivan County jail find what space they can in the overcrowded conditions that plague the facility. Cells are required by the Tennessee Corrections Institute to be at least 35 square feet. Some cells inside are no bigger than a closet, with beds for only half the prisoners inside.



## CRITICAL MASS

Unlocking the factors behind the jail overcrowding problem in Sullivan County and Bristol, Va.

“ [The Sullivan County jail] is not built for 2019. This facility’s time has come and gone. ... It’s a money pit, and that’s all it’s going to ever be.”

— Vernon Amaker, Sullivan County jail inmate

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» Experts: Overcrowded jails affect inmate, staff mental health **A7**

» Committee finds jail solutions ‘elusive’ and ‘expensive’ in 2017 report **A8**

### ONLINE

At **HeraldCourier.com**:  
» Previous stories in series  
» Photo gallery and video

### COMING WEDNESDAY

What is the current state of Bristol, Virginia’s 50-year-old lockup?

**TOWN HALL**  
7 p.m. Oct. 9  
Old Sullivan County Courthouse  
Second-floor conference room

BY LURAH SPELL  
BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

**B**LOUNTVILLE, Tenn. — Vernon Amaker — who’s been in and out of jails along the East Coast for the last 25 years — said Sullivan County’s lockup is the worst.

“The Sullivan County jail has a lot of problems,” Amaker said. “One of the major problems that we have is staff and money — staff morale and money. The facility is not built for 2019. This facility’s time has come and gone. ... It’s a money pit, and that’s all it’s going to ever be. The Jonesborough facility is a better facility, although it has different problems. The Abingdon regional facility is a better facility, but it has its own problems. Everywhere you go, you’re going to have your own problems. It all depends about the staff, and it all depends about the leadership. It also depends about



DALENA MATHEWS/BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

**Sullivan County inmate Vernon Amaker talks about being in the overcrowded jail. Out of all the jails Amaker has been incarcerated in over 25 years, Amaker believes the Sullivan County jail is the worst.**

how much money you have to spend.”

The 50-year-old was incar-

cerated without bail for about seven weeks earlier this year on theft, forgery and criminal simulation charges. He has since transferred to a Virginia Department of Corrections facility.

On a July night, Amaker was living with 31 men in a 16-bed cell at the Sullivan County jail. The temperature inside didn’t feel much different than the muggy air outside.

Cell after cell was packed with inmates. Some cells were not much bigger than a walk-in closet. Many inmates stared through the bars or the small windows of the tanks like caged animals.

A standard of the Tennessee Corrections Institute, which inspects and certifies jails in Tennessee, states that each inmate must have 35 square feet of space. Sullivan County Jail

See **INMATES**, Page A7

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# CRITICAL MASS

## Inmates

From Page A1

Operations Capt. Brian Dillard said that's impossible in both jail facilities due to overcrowding. The main jail is rated by the TCI to hold 379 inmates, and the extension, which is a separate building, is rated to hold 240 inmates.

One of Amaker's cellmates, Cedric Hardy, 27, of Atlanta, Georgia, was jailed on \$110,000 bail for 13 drug and weapons charges. He had many complaints about life in the Sullivan jail, including having the same lunch of a cheese sandwich every day and only having three phones in the cell. Some inmates steal trays from others to get extra food, he added.

Along with video phones in the cells, inmates have a small TV. To sleep, inmates have to fit like puzzle pieces on mats on the floor next to toilets and showers. Some cells only have one toilet and one shower, which leads to fights.

Hardy agrees with Amaker's assessment of Sullivan's jail.

"There's only 16 bunks in here, and we got people sleeping on the floor — on the mats on the floor," Hardy said. "We got mold on our shower walls up there. This is the worst facility I've been incarcerated in. ... There's people in here without a blanket, just a sheet — a ripped-up sheet or a dirty sheet."

There is also a TCI standard that each inmate must have one hour of recreation time, or time outside their cells, every day, but it doesn't happen here.

"In a given day, it is virtually impossible to get every single inmate out the way it's designed in one yard, and the same problem is at the main facility as well," Dillard said.

There is one fenced-in recreation area, or "yard," outside the extension and two fenced-in yards outside the main jail. At the extension, there are "day rooms" in the front of the cells.



DALENA MATHEWS/BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

Sullivan County prisoners Shelby Hall (left), 25, and Natasha Newberry, 35, talk about life inside the Sullivan County jail. "We're very overcrowded," said Hall. "I mean, it's horrible, sleeping on the floor."

**“Just being away from my kids, my family, the overcrowding that's in here — it's horrible. If we got help, maybe it could stop us from coming back.”**

— **Natasha Newberry**, Sullivan County jail inmate, mother of three

At the main jail, both yards are less than half the size of a basketball court. The stench from the nearby dumpsters wafts through the yard for female inmates, located behind the first floor of the main jail. The yard for men is outside the second floor.

"We got a little bitty rec [recreation] area that we barely go out [to], and then when we do go out, it's 6 [or] 7 o'clock in the morning," Hardy said. "Everybody's asleep when they do call for rec time, then the yard is like this cell. The yard is no bigger than the cell that we in, so we

never catching no breaks in this jail."

Jamee McCray, 32, of Toledo, Ohio, who was incarcerated on \$200,000 bail on attempted first-degree murder and firearm charges, said inmates fight over food, the TV and using the shower, toilets and phones every day.

"There's not even enough living space," he said. "We've got people laying in the middle of our bunks and everything. We don't even get out for a break. That's why they be so many fights, you know what I'm saying? Because don't nobody get

out to release they energy, and we're all cluttered, and there's no space to move in here — can't even watch TV."

Landon Ferguson, 30, of Kingsport, who was incarcerated without bail on kidnapping, robbery, carjacking and violation of probation charges, said inmates have to sleep on the floor — some without a mat or even a blanket.

"They barely have enough food here to feed us all," said Vincent Tester. "We don't get nothing to drink besides water."

The 38-year-old from Bristol, Tennessee was behind bars on

drug and weapons charges. When he finishes his sentence, he'll be transferred to U.S. Marshals Service custody on federal charges.

Inside a crowded cell for female inmates, Shelby Hall, 25, also spoke to the Herald Courier about her thoughts on the living conditions. She was jailed on trespassing, forgery, theft and failure to appear charges and has since been released. It was the second time she had been in the jail.

Hall said she was stunned by how overcrowded it is now compared to her first stint there in 2013. She described the jail as being "nice" back then, when all the women had a bed, she said.

As she spoke, she sat atop a table next to cellmate Natasha Newberry, 35, of Rogersville.

"We're very overcrowded," Hall said of jail conditions. "I mean, it's horrible, sleeping on the floor."

They were living in an 18-bunk cell with 34 women. Pair that with the difficulty of so many different personalities, and it's not good, Hall said.

"Sullivan County is at its finest right now," she said with a chuckle.

Other women in the cell laughed with her.

Newberry was jailed on several drug, identity theft, theft and failure to appear in court charges. Newberry's time in the Sullivan County jail was one of several because of her methamphetamine addiction, she said. She also faces charges in Greene County.

"Drugs is been the reason for me to come back every time," said the mother of three, ages 4, 9 and 12. "Just being away from my kids, my family, the overcrowding that's in here — it's horrible. If we got help, maybe it could stop us from coming back. ... I think I'm really done this time."

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## Experts: Overcrowded jails affect inmate, staff mental health

BY ROBERT SORRELL  
BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

Overcrowded jails across the American landscape have adverse effects on prisoners that could even be fatal, psychology experts say.

"Crowded conditions heighten the level of cognitive strain that prisoners experience by introducing social complexity, turnover, and interpersonal instability into an already dangerous prison world in which interpersonal mistakes or errors in social judgments can be fatal," Craig Haney wrote in "The Wages of Prison Overcrowding: Harmful Psychological Consequences and Dysfunctional Correctional Reactions."

Haney has written about how overcrowded jails affect inmates.

Dr. Kelly E. Moore, a licensed clinical psychologist and assistant professor at East Tennessee State University, said jail overcrowding is a common issue in many states.

Moore operates the ETSU Department of Psychology's Crime, Addiction, Re-Entry (CARE) Lab, which studies the high rates of untreated mental health and substance use problems among people in the criminal justice system.

The professor said she hasn't personally researched the subject of overcrowded jails and psychology of inmates, but she's seen it through her work.

"From my personal experience working with jails, those that are overcrowded typically have issues with being able to offer programs and treatment services to inmates," Moore said. "The waitlists for programs are so long that people get released before they are ever able to attend the program."

Basically, Moore said the more inmates in jail, the fewer who receive the already limited resources offered.



ANDRE TEAGUE/BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

Inmates walk the exercise yard at the Sullivan County jail in Blountville. Psychologists have found that overcrowded jail conditions can have long-term negative effects on inmate health.

Over the years, research suggests that overcrowding has a negative impact on inmate stress levels as well as their behavior, including disciplinary infractions and violence against other inmates or staff, Moore said.

"Overcrowding, in turn, exacerbates the chronic pains of imprisonment," Haney wrote.

Overcrowding can elevate a prisoner's blood pressure and lead to a greater number of illness complaints, Haney said.

"Not surprisingly, exposure to 'long-term, intense, inescapable crowding' of the sort that now characterizes many prisons results in high levels of stress that 'can lead to physical and psychological impairment,'" Haney wrote.

In addition, he said overcrowding has been associated with higher rates of disciplin-

ary issues. For example, one study concluded that in prisons "where crowded conditions are chronic rather than temporary ... there is a clear association between restrictions on personal space and the occurrence of disciplinary violations."

In an overcrowded facility, prisoners also are affected by the sheer number of social interactions they have that involve "high levels of uncertainty, goal interference, and cognitive load," Haney said.

Back in the 1970s and 1980s, when prison populations increased in the United States, Haney said several studies were done on overcrowding and the psychology of inmates.

"Although some of the studies are dated, nothing has changed to alter their troubling implications," Haney said.

The Stanford University pro-

fessor said the psychological toll of living in a closed environment that houses too many people can be substantial.

Overcrowded jails can also affect staff, Bristol Virginia Sheriff David Maples said.

"It increases the workload," said Maples, noting that staff must handle an increase in travel to court, medical visits and other jail activities. "It increases everything we have to do."

Corrections work is already considered a stressful job.

The sheriff said he's never heard of a corrections officer leaving the job because of overcrowding.

"Working in a jail is not easy," Maples said.

Often, employees leave to work at a local police department for better pay and benefits, the sheriff said. Sometimes, Maples said people also leave to

### NEGATIVE EFFECTS

- » **Cognitive strain** caused by high turnover and unstable social situations
- » **Higher levels of violence** against other inmates and staff, resulting in more disciplinary action
- » **Illness**, especially high blood pressure and stress-related impairment, both mental and physical
- » **Compromised safety and security measures** throughout jail
- » **Limited personal space** and chronic crowded conditions
- » **Long waits and limited access** to treatment services and training programs
- » **Increased workload** for jail staff

Sources: Craig Haney, Kelly E. Moore, Sheriff David Maples

go to other jails, including many that are also overcrowded.

The U.S. Government Accountability Office studied overcrowding in the Bureau of Prisons (BOP) system in 2012.

"According to BOP and our observations, the growth of the federal inmate population and related crowding have negatively affected inmates housed in BOP institutions, institutional staff, and the infrastructure of BOP facilities, and have contributed to inmate misconduct, which affects staff and inmate security and safety," the report states.

Maples noted that safety and security is a concern for all jails, not just those that are overcrowded.

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# CRITICAL MASS

## MEMBERS ON MULTIPLE COMMITTEES

	Corrections Partnership	Executive Team	Transition Center Task Group	Justice System Evaluation and Planning Task Group	Jail Task Group	Sheriff/Jail Ad Hoc Committee
Richard Venable	■	■				
Larry Bailey	■	■				
Wally Boyd	■		■			■
Jeff Cassidy	■	■				
Tracey Kittrell	■	■			■	
Lee Carswell	■	■		■	■	
Barry Staubus				■		■
Jim Goodwin		■		■		
William Rogers		■		■		
Denise Miller			■	■		
Bill Kilgore				■		■

● County officials (commissioners, county employees)     ● Court system officials (judges, district attorneys)  
● Law enforcement officials and jail personnel     ● Mental health and addiction professionals  
● Other members



ANDRE TEAGUE/BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

Capt. Lee Carswell, chief jail administrator, talks about the chronic overcrowding at the Sullivan County jail in Blountville. Carswell serves on several committees currently tasked with developing a plan for the jail's future.

# Sullivan committee: Jail solutions 'elusive as they are expensive'

BY LURAH SPELL  
BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

BLOUNTVILLE, Tenn. — The chairman of a committee that spent three years studying how best to alleviate overcrowding at the Sullivan County jail said in his final report that solutions proved to be as “elusive as they are expensive.” Wally Boyd, chairman of the Sheriff/Jail Ad Hoc Committee, wrote in December 2017 that members spent “hundreds of hours in a painstaking examination of the current jail.”

In the end, the committee recommended an immediate expansion of the current jail, although work on the possible solutions didn't begin until this year.

It also recommended that the County Commission hire an outside firm to develop a master plan to address overcrowding and for the jail's future.

### Facing decertification

To avoid decertification of the jail facilities, the committee was formed in 2014 by county officials as part of a plan submitted to the Tennessee Corrections Institute. Its task: Find a solution to overcrowding.

The jail facilities have been overcrowded since they opened — the main jail more than 30 years ago and the “extension” more than a decade ago. Over the years, there have been expansions to make room for a growing inmate population, but they were all nearly immediately overcrowded.

Every month, Sullivan County Sheriff's Office officials send progress reports to TCI, and the

jail has to be recertified every year. Last year, the facilities failed to meet “applicable minimum standards” set by the TCI and were again facing decertification.

When the committee's final report was issued nearly two years ago, there was a combined daily inmate population, on average, of 730 inmates with “surges” on the weekend that brought the total close to 900.

“This number of inmates has never been higher in our history and represents the highest rate of incarceration in our history as well,” Boyd wrote in the report.

Currently, the average daily population has topped 1,000.

In his report, Boyd went on to state that Sullivan County District Attorney General Barry Staubus, who was also a committee member, said overcrowding had reached “crisis” proportions.

“Echoing those comments, Sullivan County Criminal Court Judge James Goodwin warned that a host of factors — overcrowding chief among them — had achieved ‘critical mass’ and urgently needed to be addressed,” Boyd wrote. “The health and safety of prisoners and guards alike, both men endangered on a daily basis. D.A. Staubus also spoke of the ongoing liability issues inherent in such chronic overcrowding (as well as the considerable costs to Sullivan County taxpayers should legal action result).”

### Outside firm hired

The County Commission followed the committee's recom-

ONLINE

» View the full December 2017 report submitted by the Sheriff/Jail Ad Hoc Committee and the 2016 needs assessment completed by Jim Hart.

mendation to bring in an “outside expert” by hiring MBI — a Knoxville design firm — to design the plan, which will also include a needs assessment. TreanorHL, another design firm, has partnered with MBI to work on the design.

In August, the firms presented two expansion options to jail and county officials and discussed a third that would build a new jail and centralize the county's courts in Blountville. The final master plan is slated to be presented to the County Commission by November.

The committee also recommended using the current facilities but adding infrastructure to support the expansion, including a new kitchen, laundry area, medical facilities and booking area to support larger populations.

Prior to the committee's work in June 2016, Jim Hart, a jail management consultant with the University of Tennessee's County Technical Assistance Service, released a 41-page needs assessment on Sullivan County's jail facilities.

Hart determined, among several other concerns, that the jail routinely exceeds capacity and is understaffed, that “inmate classification is jeopardized by crowding conditions that has the potential to lead to a failure of officials to protect liabil-

## COMMITTEE MEMBERS

### Corrections Partnership

- **Richard Venable**, county mayor
- **Larry Bailey**, accounts and budget director
- **Wally Boyd**, chairman of Sheriff/Jail Ad Hoc Committee\*
- **Colette George**, county commissioner
- **Dwight King**, county commissioner
- **Hunter Locke**, county commissioner
- **Jeff Cassidy**, sheriff
- **Tracey Kittrell**, Sheriff's Office chief deputy
- **Lee Carswell**, Sheriff's Office chief jail administrator
- **Don Gonce**, community leader

### Transition Center Task Group

- **Denise Miller**, coordinator for Sullivan County Felony Recovery Court
- **Brenda Hawthorne**, specialist for Veterans Justice Outreach Program
- **Linda Burrow**, county probation officer
- **Kelci Wright**, state probation officer
- **Sherri Feathers**, senior vice president of Specialty Services
- **David Stanley**, self-help and education provider
- **Tracey Kittrell**, Sheriff's Office chief deputy
- **Wally Boyd**, chairman of Sheriff/Jail Ad Hoc Committee
- **Mark Hutton**, county commissioner

### Jail Task Group

- **Tracey Kittrell**, Sheriff's Office chief deputy
- **Lee Carswell**, Sheriff's Office chief jail administrator
- **Christy Frazier**, jail health administrator
- **Melissa Copas**, jail administrative captain
- **Brian Dillard**, jail operations captain
- **Eddie Williams**, former county commissioner
- **Mark Vance**, county commissioner

\*The Sheriff/Jail Ad Hoc Committee completed its work in December 2017. Those listed as being former public servants held those positions when the committee existed.

### Executive Team

- **Richard Venable**, county mayor
- **Jeff Cassidy**, sheriff
- **Tracey Kittrell**, Sheriff's Office chief deputy
- **Lee Carswell**, Sheriff's Office chief jail administrator
- **Jim Goodwin**, criminal court judge
- **Ray Konkin**, general sessions court judge
- **William Rogers**, circuit court judge
- **Larry Bailey**, accounts and budget director
- **Gary Stidham**, county commissioner

### Justice System Evaluation and Planning Task Group

- **Klyne Lauderback**, general sessions court judge
- **William Rogers**, circuit court judge
- **Jim Goodwin**, criminal court judge
- **Barry Staubus**, district attorney general
- **Gene Perrin**, deputy district attorney general
- **William Harper**, assistant district attorney general
- **Denise Miller**, coordinator for Sullivan County Felony Recovery Court
- **Suzanne Eleas**, Tennessee Board of Probation and Parole supervisor
- **Bill Kilgore**, former county commissioner
- **Darlene Calton**, county commissioner
- **Lee Carswell**, Sheriff's Office chief jail administrator
- **Andrew Gibbons**, public defender

### Sheriff/Jail Ad Hoc Committee\*

- **Wally Boyd**, chairman of Sheriff/Jail Ad Hoc Committee
- **Bill Kilgore**, former commissioner
- **Sherry Grubb**, former commissioner
- **Cheryl Russell**, former commissioner
- **Mark Bowery**, former commissioner
- **Cindy Stewart**, former commissioner
- **Barry Staubus**, district attorney general
- **Greg Simcox**, Sheriff's Office assistant chief
- **Lisa Christian**, former Sheriff's Office chief deputy
- **Wayne Anderson**, former sheriff
- **Ernie Rumsby**, president of Tri-Cities Military Affairs Council

ity issues” and that the linear design is “dated and manpower intensive.”

He also took issue with no one keeping track of how many inmates have substance abuse problems and/or serious mental illnesses, trends in probation and parole violations and recidivism rates.

Hart recommended additional bed space for inmates to support an inmate classification system and areas for special-needs housing. He also suggested that data regarding lengths of stay in custody, lengths of stay at time of sentencing, time to move through the grand jury, and the number of special-needs inmates be tracked to identify population trends.

In addition, he wrote that any jail expansion or design should include podular housing for “more control and enhanced lines of sight” and a request for qualifications (RFQ) developed to hire an architectural firm to assess space needs for expansion or new construction.

The commission approved development of an RFQ in January 2017, and it took more than a year to finalize the document. Firms began sending in submissions in February 2018.

### Master plan process

Earlier this year, Jay Henderlight, an architect with MBI, asked that three committees be formed — one made up of law enforcement officials, a second made up of judges and the district attorney's office and a third to include members of the other two committees. He recommended that commissioners, jail personnel and mental health and drug addiction treatment professionals also serve on the committees.

Sullivan County Mayor Richard Venable appointed five committees to work with MBI on developing the master plan.

Venable, taking into consideration suggestions of Sheriff's Office administrators, formed and appointed members to the Transition Center Task Group, Justice System Evaluation and Planning Task Group, Jail Task Group, Executive Team and Corrections Partnership. All the committees will work with MBI. The task groups will do the brunt of the work then make their recommendations to the Corrections Partnership and the Executive Team.

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**SYRIA**

TRUMP SHIFTS TONE ON TURKEY IN EFFORT TO HALT INVASION

**WORLD » A9**



**VOLLEYBALL**

LEBANON VOLLEYS PAST BEARCATS TO FORCE TIE AT TOP OF DISTRICT

**SPORTS » B1**



# BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

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**Impeachment Investigation**

## White House won't comply with inquiry

BY ZEKE MILLER and JILL COLVIN  
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The White House declared Tuesday it will halt any and all cooperation with what it termed the “illegitimate” impeachment probe by House Democrats, sharpening the constitutional clash between President Donald Trump and Congress.

Trump attorneys sent a lengthy letter to House leaders bluntly stating White House refusal to participate in the inquiry that was given a boost by last week's release of a whistleblower's complaint that the president sought political favors from Ukraine.

“Given that your inquiry lacks any legitimate constitutional foundation, any pretense of fairness, or even the most elementary due process protections, the Executive Branch cannot be expected to participate in it,” White House Counsel Pat Cipollone wrote.

That means no additional witnesses under administration purview will be

See **INQUIRY**, Page A5

**INSIDE**



Outdoor classroom to be named at Emmett » A3

Thank you, **Ida Hughes**, for subscribing to the Bristol Herald Courier.

Weather » A12



## SPECIAL REPORT DAY 4

# A daily struggle

Bristol, Virginia keeps operating its jail despite myriad challenges



ANDRE TEAGUE/BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

Bristol Virginia Sheriff David Maples talks about the overcrowded population and the aging structure of the city's 50-year-old jail facility.

BY DAVID MCGEE | BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

**B**RISTOL, Va. — Substantial gray metal doors in the city's five-decade-old jail are locked and unlocked around the clock, seven days a week, 52 weeks a year, as inmates shuffle back and forth to court, to the exercise area, to meet with visitors or attorneys or — on their best days — to be released. ♦ But as prisoner intake continues to exceed releases, the 50-year-old locks on those 50-year-old doors must function every time. Sometimes, they don't — just one of myriad challenges inherent in operating a facility in constant use. No weekends or nights off. If one lock fails, the routine is disrupted, people are inconvenienced, repairs must be made or — in a worst-case scenario — a prisoner could escape. ♦ Sheriff David Maples and his staff deal with such challenges every day.

“Most of our doors are mechanical. We do have some electrical locks in the cellblocks and several electronic doors. It is difficult to get those worked on. We have a company that works on those, but they're not local,” Maples said. “The company that originally built the doors — Roanoke Power and Bridge Works — is out of business. It is harder to get parts for what we have. The company from Georgia we work with has done a good job.”

Nobody would mistake

this aging lockup for a country club.

It is grossly overcrowded, typically running at more than 230% capacity. Certified by the state to house 67 prisoners, it can accommodate 134 with two bunk beds per cell, but its average daily census of between 150 and 160 means upwards of 30 typically sleep on the tile floor.

And those totals don't count the 50 to 60 additional prisoners the city pays to house at other facilities.

See **BRISTOL**, Page A6



**CRITICAL MASS**

Unlocking the factors behind the jail overcrowding problem in Sullivan County and Bristol, Va.

**MORE COVERAGE**

**INSIDE**  
» Former inmate suggests overcrowding options **A7**  
» Guest editorial from Barry Staubus **A10**

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**COMING THURSDAY**  
Alternative programs aimed at helping inmates get out and stay out of jail

**TOWN HALL**  
7 p.m. tonight  
Old Sullivan County Courthouse  
Second-floor conference room

## Current city jail has rich 50-year history

BY DAVID MCGEE  
BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

BRISTOL, Va. — The city's aging, overcrowded jail was once hailed as “among the finest in the country,” but it was also at the heart of a federal investigation into a former city sheriff.

Bristol, Virginia locked its first prisoners into the current two-story, 20,000-square-foot jail in June 1970, according to a story in the Bristol Herald Courier. The building complex, which included a new police headquarters and was labeled the public safety building, formally opened in early May. A grand opening was held May 17, 1970, which allowed the public to view the facilities.

See **HISTORY**, Page A7

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# CRITICAL MASS

## Bristol

From Page A1

There is no air conditioning in cellblock areas, and the building's aging infrastructure requires regular repairs.

City officials estimate the building has about 10 years of viable use remaining.

"Structurally, the building is sound, but wear and tear on things like the electrical parts, the heat, plumbing — we have issues with 50-year-old water pipes.

The city did an energy upgrade a couple years ago with new lighting and water-saving devices, and those helped to some degree, with some modifications from us," Maples said.

Old water lines develop "pin-hole" leaks, and many have been repaired or replaced, Maples said.

Talk of air conditioning, Maples said, is about better working conditions — not comfort — when dealing with a large, confined population managed by a fraction of that number.

A portion of the building has cooling, but the jail control center, kitchen and medical areas, as well as hallways and cells, are not air-conditioned.

A series of large fans circulated air through the cellblocks during the Herald Courier's late August visit, keeping the interior temperature similar to the unseasonably mild 77 degrees recorded outside that day.

Preliminary estimates of \$500,000 to air-condition the entire facility and \$150,000 to replace aging water lines are beyond the means of cash-strapped Bristol, Virginia.

Those new water-saving toilets, sinks and water fountains installed three years ago? Some are already failing from perpetual use.

Five years ago, consultants determined a new jail housing 230 prisoners could cost \$40 million. Based on the July 2019 census, it would have been at 95% capacity today.

City leaders also considered converting the adjoining former police department offices into space for prisoners but determined it wouldn't be a worthwhile investment.

But there is no major expansion or new jail on the horizon. This is Bristol, in 2017 judged the most fiscally distressed city in Virginia by the state Comptroller's Office. Bristol, which maxed out its fiscal borrowing capacity to build a half-vacant shopping center and a landfill. Bristol, where the only apparent alternative is closing the current jail and transferring all its prisoners elsewhere, except it would cost more to house them in the Southwest Virginia Regional Jail facility than continue operating the aging jail.

### Population rise

On July 19, 2019, the city jail built for 67 held 152 inmates.

Sixty-two were in the Southwest Virginia Regional Jail at Abingdon, and another three were at the New River Valley Regional Jail in Dublin — a total of 217 prisoners.

"We just started using the New River Jail two weeks ago. We're told the regional jail is full," Maples said in July. A follow-up check in August revealed six were at the New River Jail, and 54 at Abingdon — but those numbers ebb and flow regularly.

Of the 152 in Bristol in July, only 43 had been sentenced. Sixty-one were classified as pretrial, meaning they're charged, but their case isn't finalized, and 28 were held on probation violation charges — meaning they were released from a prior conviction but then did something to get rearrested.

Prisoners are first brought in through the jail's front door and taken straight to a booking area, where they are handcuffed to one of three metal benches bolted to the floor. After being processed, they are given an orange jumpsuit, surrender their clothing and are led down a two-tone blue hallway toward the cellblock areas.

A substantial white dry-erase board attached to a wall just past the booking desk is filled with inmate names and cellblock information — another way to help jailers keep track of everyone.



Melvin Davis, a Bristol Virginia Jail inmate, talks about the conditions as Allen Foran listens. "Some people wake up on the wrong side of the bed, have certain issues," says Davis. "...They really give dogs more space than this."

Melvin Davis, a 25-year-old inmate originally from Birmingham, Alabama, is serving an 11-month sentence for violating the terms of his probation after serving 3.5 years of his original four-year sentence.

"It's not very spacious," Davis said. "Most every block has at least 19 in it. You never really get in a block with less than 15 people. If there's 15 people in a block, that's the low ball."

Davis is currently housed with other trusties — offenders with nonviolent convictions whose behavior allows them to perform supervised labor inside and outside the jail. Davis much prefers the trusty cellblock.

"This block [trusties], everybody gets along," Davis said. "When you go to other blocks, and it's not trusties, and they are not working and don't get to do anything, people get aggravated. Some people wake up on the wrong side of the bed, have certain issues. ... Nobody wants to be overcrowded. They really give dogs more space than this."

Of the 65 city inmates held at facilities other than the city jail in July, 18 were pretrial and seven were held on probation violation. One inmate was being held for the federal government.

Overcrowded jails are common across Virginia and the nation. But each presents a unique financial juggling act for the locality. Bristol's inmate rise occurred steadily over the past 20 years.

In 1998, the city jail's average daily population was a "very manageable" 76, slightly above its Department of Corrections rating of 67, Maples said. Two years later, in 2000, the average climbed to 85, and in 2001, it was 111.

The average daily census remained between 90 and 110 through the early 2000s but shot up to 124 for the year in 2005 and exploded to 141.7 for the year in 2006. It crept north of 150 during four months that year before dipping back into the 130s for the next three years.

"Once we reached the 145 average daily, that's not a true picture because we had inmates outside of the jail. Had they been here, it would have been 200," Maples said. "We might go 220 or 230, but they were in three other facilities. It's been a steady rise. Here of late, we haven't seen much dip."

Of that total, the jail typically has about 26 female inmates with an official capacity for 21, but that total also fluctuates. On an Aug. 29 visit, there were 31 female inmates. Sixteen were sandwiched into cellblock five. During the day, they sit on metal benches or on their bunks and sometimes play cards seated on the floor. With bunk space for 10, six must sleep on mattresses on the tile floor.

"It's hard sometimes missing my family. I want to go home, but the female deputies, they help us. They're there for us. ... They talk to us, and sometimes they're all we have to bring us up when we're really down," inmate Betty Graham of Bristol, Virginia said.

Graham, 52, has been inside for four months due to a violation of probation charge. She said it's sometimes hard to get along with everyone when inmates are packed so tightly.

### Bristol Virginia Jail average population (within Bristol facility)

Year	Avg.
2019*	155.7
2018	151.9
2017	147.3
2016	142.6
2015	140
2014	148.3
2013	151.1
2012	147.1
2011	144.5
2010	134.3
2009	128.8
2008	132.6
2007	135.1
2006	141.7
2005	124.1
2004	103.6
2003	96.8
2002	108.9
2001	111
2000	85.8

\* For the first six months of 2019

an inmate with state charges eligible for intake into their facilities after being held locally for 60 days.

"At that point, DOC should be picking up the inmates. What we've been told is there is not enough bed space in DOC, so it's been shifted to the locality," City Manager Randy Eads said.

### State-certified

Despite all of its challenges, the city jail was recertified in March 2019 by the Virginia Department of Corrections.

The state inspects the jail annually for "life, health and safety" issues. Every three years, it undergoes a much more detailed review of the entire facility.

"The inspectors come and go through the standards and see if we meet the standards," Maj. Ron Hutton said. "They go into the jail and make sure we're compliant on lighting, water, cleanliness. They inspect the kitchen to make sure it's clean and adequate."

In recent years, the jail has met every standard "100%" except for one item this past year — failing to complete an annual review of the mission statement by the inspection date.

"It's harder to comply when you're overcrowded and have 25 people on the floor," Hutton said. However, the jail is "grandfathered in" under prior state standards for space for inmates.

"We are an almost 50-year-old facility, and if we had to meet the standards of today required for space, we couldn't do it," Maples said.

The review is detailed. Officials must account for every hypodermic needle, jug of bleach and kitchen utensil, as well as time in the recreation yard and visitation time each inmate receives.

In separate reviews, no violations were found in the jail's kitchen during two of its last four inspections by the Mount Rogers Health District, part of the Virginia Department of Health. Records show no issues were found during inspections in February 2019 and November 2017. One issue was found during inspections in June 2018 and April 2017. The 2018 issue was an improper temperature control for a device holding cold food items, while the 2017 violation was prepared food in a storage unit was not properly dated. Both were corrected during the inspection.

### Operating costs

The city's jail is among the least expensive to operate statewide, according to a 2018 report by the Virginia Compensation Board.

The board calculated Bristol's daily operating costs at \$62.39 per inmate per day for fiscal 2017-18, ranking it among the lower third of the state's 60 local jails. It showed a \$3.45 million operating budget, with 56.09% of funding coming from the state, 43.05% from the city and less than 1% from other sources.

Those figures don't include the locally borne cost of housing inmates in other jails, nor does it include the city-paid employee benefits and expenses associated with other portions of the Sheriff's Office operations, specifically the six deputies assigned to courthouse security.

The calculation includes jail personnel salaries, food and medical services for inmates, programs, transportation and other support, along with 53 Compensation Board-funded positions.

### Behavior

The Bristol jail ran at 226% of its operating capacity for fiscal 2017-18, with an average of 152 inmates, the state report shows.

Housing so many people in a space designed for less than half that presents issues for those both inside and outside the cells.

"We have our share of issues among inmates. It's always in the shower. Every time we have an incident, law enforcement is called, police come and investigate," Maples said. "There is a code among inmates. A guy will say he slipped in the shower or fell out of his bunk. We wish they would report it; we encourage them to report it."

The Sheriff's Office did provide the number of times a prisoner or jail employee sustained physical harm, but that could include anything from a fight among inmates to a twisted ankle or a minor injury sustained by a kitchen employee.

From 2014 to 2018, there were 345 such incidents reported — an average of 69 per year — although the 111 reported in 2015 skew that average. An average of 60 incidents per year have been reported over the past 10 years. In addition, if multiple people are involved in a single incident, a separate report is filed for each one.

Five inmates have died while in city custody since 2010, the most recent in April. Jeremiah Wilson, 33, suffered a medical emergency while inside the jail and was transported to Bristol Regional Medical Center, where he died. Foul play was not suspected, Maples said.

In 2018, 36-year-old Tony Authenreath of Bristol, Tennessee attempted to commit suicide while in custody. He was taken to Bristol Regional Medical Center, where he later died.

In April 2016, 60-year-old Larry Douglas Tinker of Erwin was found unresponsive in his cell after being charged with public intoxication and trespassing. He died within one day of being booked into the facility.

In 2014 inmate Terry Hudson, 56, died due to health-related issues. In 2010, 59-year-old inmate William Clark of Bristol, Virginia died of health-related issues.

There have been four escapes from the city jail since 2008 but none since 2017. In the most recent, Steven Andrew Thompson, 30, wasn't handcuffed when he fled from the jail's booking area as someone who was leaving the building opened the front door, a day after first being arrested. He was recaptured about 30 hours later.

"As a rule, most of them [inmates] behave pretty well. I give credit to the staff we have. They're professional. They deal with the inmates with respect," Maples said. "Inmates can be challenging. We deal with a lot of folks who have mental health issues, and that is challenging. As a whole, most do what they're supposed to. Behavior is unpredictable, but you have to keep safety and security in mind no matter what you do."

The jail has a small recreation yard that was added in 1991, city records show, and it helps relieve the stress of confinement, the sheriff said.

"We try to get everybody out once or twice a week. Depending on weather, we try to get them an hour per [cellblock]," Maples said. "We'll start early in the morning; typically they don't want to get out of bed. Early in [the] morning it may be two or three, but later in the day, more will come out."

While inmates are outside, staff will clean the cellblocks and search for drugs, weapons or other contraband.

"We do a daily cleanup, house-keeping — sweep, mop and take out trash," Maples said. "A couple trusties or guys on the block assist with cleaning top to bottom. Cellblocks are mopped and

See **JAIL**, Page A7



Betty Graham, an inmate in the Bristol Virginia Jail, says the female deputies are "sometimes ... all we have to bring us up when we're really down."

"We basically get along great, but it depends on the type of person you put in here. If you live a rough life on the street ... you've got your troublemakers, and you've got your good people," Graham said. "It could be a lot worse. I could be in Blountville [Sullivan County jail], and I don't want to be there."

City records show the jail first sent inmates to the Southwest Virginia Regional Jail in Abingdon in 2007, but not in 2008 and 2009. After another two-year break in 2012 and 2013, the city has continually sent inmates there since May 2014.

Some city prisoners were also sent to the Western Regional Jail in Salem between 2011 and early 2018 and the Charlotte County Virginia Jail from 2012 through 2018. Both facilities charged \$35 per inmate per day, compared to the \$38 fee previously charged by the Abingdon jail, which now charges \$39 per inmate per day. The Dublin jail is charging \$30 per inmate per day.

A portion of the city's inmates "belong" to the Virginia Department of Corrections. On one day back in July, that total exceeded 50.

"We have 53 DOC-sentenced inmates today," the sheriff said during the July 19 interview, "20 of which are DOC-eligible, meaning they have enough time in to be taken to DOC. A state-responsible inmate, we receive \$12 a day. A local inmate is \$4. It's not a great amount of money."

The state department considers

# CRITICAL MASS

## Jail

From Page A6

cleaned every day, seven days a week. As old as it is, I think we do a pretty good job of it."

Sleeping arrangements are first-come, first-served. If there are 14 mattresses and 17 inmates in a cellblock, the last three arrivals sleep on the floor.

Prisoners also eat in their cells, and, as simple as it sounds, staff must always count to make the same number of cups and trays come out as went in, since either could be converted into weapons.

### Lack of programming

"We don't have a lot of rehabilitative programs," Maples said. "We offer GED classes if a prisoner doesn't have a high school diploma. We do a program through Highlands Community Services that's a parenting class called a Moms and Dads class for men and women. That helps."

During 2018, 15 men and eight women participated in GED attainment classes and testing. In addition, 18 men and 59 women participated in the parenting classes.

The jail also offers regular religious services and logged more than 1,400 programs during 2018.

With a number of inmates arrested on drug or drug-related charges, the jail reported 38 inmates participated in drug rehabilitation programming through Bristol, Virginia-based Tri-Cities Recovery during 2018.

### Working outside

The city jail offers supervised work opportunities for inmates who want to get out of their cells for a time, including cleaning up highway rights-of-way. During 2018 inmates picked up 10,000 pounds of trash, serviced 27 private properties and mowed five rights-of-way, according to the sheriff's annual report.

Inmates also provided labor at the jail farm, raising and cutting hay to feed cattle, which will provide beef for the jail kitchen.

In total, inmates provided over 35,000 man hours assisting nonprofit agencies, performing courthouse maintenance, working around city property, landscaping, painting and working in the jail kitchen, laundry and farm.

Davis, one of the trustees, said working outside is welcome relief.

"We clean around the city, do brush work and cut trees. ... I enjoy that, just to get out and work a little bit," Davis said. "We went to beside the Boys and Girls Club to Bristol apartments and cleaned out the apartments. Basically we just do stuff around the community, and it's better than sitting around — way better than sitting around."

Inmate Allen Foran of Blountville is serving an 18-month sentence for violation of probation. As a trustee, he cooks every day in the jail kitchen.

This marks his third or fourth stint in the city jail, but he says even then it's a better situation than in Sullivan County.

"If you get 19 people in a block, it gets aggravating because you don't have room to move. But compared to other jails, I would rather be here," Foran said. "I hate that jail [Sullivan]. It's horrible."

Foran said he was briefly held in Sullivan County's jail before being extradited to Bristol.

"It's a lot different. Everybody is aggravated all the time because it's so overcrowded," Foran said of the Sullivan jail. Asked if it's more dangerous than Bristol, Foran said yes. "Nobody is in a good mood over there, hatin' life. It's like a dungeon. You can hardly see out if you're up at the [extension]."

### Staffing and budgets

The city Sheriff's Office has 53 funded full-time positions, including six in court security and four administrative spots. Certified officer positions are funded by the Virginia State Compensation Board, meaning the state pays about \$2.26 million for salaries, but localities pick up about \$1.1 million for employee health insurance and benefits.

Jail staffing levels are prescribed by the Compensation Board based on inmate population.

Food service for inmates cost more than \$241,000 in fiscal 2017-18, slightly less than the \$246,000 bill for inmate medical care.

Deputies are also responsible for transporting prisoners — whether it's a short walk to local courts, an hourslong ride for a mental evaluation or delivering a state inmate to a prison in some far corner of the commonwealth. Transports can occur 24 hours a day and every day of the week.

The Sheriff's Office staff completed 1,249 inmate transports during 2018, or an average of 3.4 per day. Transportation costs exceeded \$47,500 for the year.

During 2018, the city's Circuit Court was in session 211 days, Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court was in session 229 days and General District Court was in session 128 days, according to jail records.

Staff turnover is also a problem.

"One of our biggest challenges is keeping staff," Maples said. "The last few years we've had a lot that have left for more money. Our starting pay is \$31,629. It's hard. A lot of our folks do other jobs to make ends meet. We're constantly hiring. ... Deputies go to the police department or to the Tennessee side or the federal government."

Health insurance costs in recent years have exceeded pay increases, Maples said. "I can't think of a time in recent years we've been fully staffed. We'll get close, and someone will come in and resign," Maples said. "It's a hard job. People have left to do other things because it is not easy."

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## History

From Page A1

Prisoners were transferred in June after mattresses and other jail furnishings arrived and were installed.

The complex cost \$865,000 to construct, and the jail design included blocks of seven cells plus space for as many as 11 female prisoners, according to another Herald Courier story. The report boasted of private conference rooms for meeting with attorneys and a "glass-divided" visiting room for families. The control center operated five electric doors in the inmate area.

A tunnel was built to facilitate taking prisoners to and from the new courthouse, which was under construction at that time.

The adjoining police complex was built as a civil defense control center capable of withstanding nuclear radiation with 25-inch-thick walls and underground tanks for water and diesel fuel to operate electric generators.

The two-story brick lockup, billed as having 70 beds in 1970, replaced the former three-story jail that opened in 1914.

That old jail was recalled in a book, "True Stories from the Files of the FBI" by W. Cleon Skousen, which relates the tale of Mississippi killer Kinnie "Two Gun" Wagner's capture in Virginia. Known as the "Hillbilly John Dillinger," Wagner and

## TIMELINE

### BRISTOL VIRGINIA JAIL

#### 1914

Original jail opens.

#### 1970

Current jail formally opens.

#### 1992

Federal agents investigate allegations of wrongdoing by former city Sheriff Marshall Honaker. He committed suicide by shooting himself in his office in January 1992.

#### 2007

Jail first sent inmates to the Southwest Virginia Regional Jail in Abingdon. After two-year breaks in 2008-09 and 2012-13, the city has continually sent inmates since May 2014.

#### 2019

City jail was recertified by the Va. Department of Corrections.

his arrest caused quite a stir. "An overwhelming number of 'relatives,' allegedly wives, brothers, sisters, cousins and others stormed the Bristol Virginia jail where he was held, desiring to see 'Two Gun' Kinnie," according to the book.

Apparently several women who claimed to be Wagner's wife contacted local police. But Wagner told authorities he'd never been married because authorities "locked him up before he had a chance to do any courting," according to the book. Wagner was later transferred to a jail in Lynchburg before being returned to Mississippi.

Federal agents returned to Bristol in 1992 for another reason altogether — investigating allegations of wrongdoing of former city Sheriff Marshall Honaker.

Back then, Bristol's jail had extra space — empty cells that Honaker offered to overcrowded jurisdictions, including the U.S. Marshals Service. However, Honaker was accused of skimming \$377,700 in payments to his jail made by the District of Columbia and the federal government for housing prisoners and using it to buy a lavish home and vehicles. An investigation by the FBI and the Internal Revenue Service began shortly after he bought a house worth six times his annual salary, the Associated Press reported at that time.

According to an IRS affidavit, federal agents raided the sheriff's home and office Jan. 10, 1992. They seized his \$245,000 home, truck and car and found \$63,281 in cash stashed in his office desk.

Honaker, 55, committed suicide by shooting himself in his office in January 1992, a day after a federal grand jury in Roanoke began an investigation. He was the sheriff for 18 years and was president of the National Sheriff's Association but quit a few days after his home and office were raided.



### ONLINE

View the FBI file on Honaker with this story at [HeraldCourier.com](http://HeraldCourier.com).



DAVID CRIGGER/BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

Sean Stutzer reflects on his time in the Sullivan County jail, where he spent more than a year. "And it was the hardest time I ever did," Stutzer said.

## 'A temporary fix'

Former inmate suggests alternatives to overcrowding

BY JOE TENNIS  
BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

BRISTOL, Va. — Sean Stutzer's success story — how he bought his own home in Bristol, Virginia — should have happened many years ago.

But, back then, Stutzer was pushing pills and dealing drugs in practically every neighborhood in town — from Bellehaven to Johnson Court and Rice Terrace.

Stutzer, 32, built such a profitable business out of helping people get high that he moved out of his parents' home during his senior year at Virginia High School. And he lived on drug money while experimenting with writing lyrics and recording hip-hop music.

Still, the music world took him into toxic turbulence, fueled by pipe dreams and crack pipes.

"And it kind of opened the doors for me to a lot of people who were drug-connected in the area," he said.

Stutzer fostered some dreams of going to Manhattan to study music.

But he never made it.

He was making so much drug dough, running around Bristol.

"I sold more crack in Bellehaven than I did in 'The Terrace,'" Stutzer said. "I did everything. I sold pills all over the place."

### 'All I could think about'

What finally yanked Stutzer off the streets: a drug bust at a motel room in Bristol, Tennessee. Police arrested Stutzer and his former girlfriend, the mother of his daughter, at a motel room standing less than 1,000 feet from Haynesfield Elementary School on April 4, 2007.

Proximity to the school property — 948 feet, according to Stutzer — made the couple's subsequent drug convictions stick solidly, since they were technically inside a school zone.

Caught with 25 grams of cocaine, Stutzer was sentenced to eight years in the Tennessee prison system. Yet, almost as soon, he was convicted in Bristol, Virginia for selling a half-gram of crack cocaine.

That gave him another year behind bars.

Federal authorities also clamped down on Stutzer, charging him with conspiracy to distribute cocaine. And, for that, he ended up with yet another year.

All total, at just 20 years old, Stutzer faced a solid decade before he would again find his freedom.

"But that's the way it happened," Stutzer said. "That's the way the cards fell for me. And I made the best of it. I educated myself."

His girlfriend, meanwhile, was also arrested. She was six months pregnant, and the couple's daughter would be born at the Sullivan County jail in Blountville, Tennessee.

That baby has since been adopted by Stutzer's mother, he said.

"And all I could think about, all those years, was getting out here and being a father," he added.

### 'That's insane'

Stutzer's sail into the system of six jails and seven prisons began in 2007.

Close to Bristol, he spent more than a year in the Sullivan County jail.

"And it was the hardest time I ever did," he said. "In 16-man cells, they were as many as 45 people in there on any given day."

Stutzer shook his head.

"There were people in there with 30 years' prison time, waiting to go down the road. And then you got dudes being brought in for public intoxication," Stutzer said. "It was vicious in there. I saw people get their head busted every day and took out of there, leaking."

Soon after Stutzer's arrival, a jail extension opened, and jail conditions got a



Stutzer

little better — with about 20 men to a cell, Stutzer said.

"But, from what I've heard, and this happened at every place that adds more bed space, all they do is lock more people up," he said. "It never

keeps overcrowding down. Extra bed space has never, ever been anything but a temporary fix for overcrowding because they just fill it right back up."

The answer, according to Stutzer, is not to build more jails.

"The answer is changing the way you're locking people up, giving people sentences that are true to their crimes, making alternative programs."

Junkies and drug dealers are being sent "to the same place, where they can do the same things and expect them to be rehabilitated and come home and do different things," Stutzer said. "That's insane. It doesn't work."

### 'Be real'

Today, after being released from a federal halfway house on April 27, 2017, Stutzer has rebuilt his life, establishing credit and buying a small home with a job paying \$14 an hour — quite a climb from the few cents an hour he got for washing dishes in prison.

"Since I've been home, I've done everything legit," he said. "I've turned everything around."

Even more recently, he was promoted to training coordinator of Virginia operations at Strongwell Corp. in Bristol, Virginia, where he now uses his videography skills to implement plantwide training and assist in marketing.

Still, he is also paying a price for his crimes. Each month, Stutzer sends \$50 to both Tennessee and Virginia for fines that he expects to continue paying for the next 12-15 years.

Stutzer performs hip-hop as "Sean Stutz," and he runs his own ministry, mixing music with testimony of redemption. Stutzer shares how hard it is to rebuild your life after being a caged criminal.

"Part of his story is he had every opportunity, but he just blew it," said Dale Wright, 51, the pastor of Judah Church in Bristol, Tennessee.

"He doesn't shy away from his testimony and faith in God," said Wright, who met Stutzer when Stutzer was locked up at the state prison in Mountain City, Tennessee. "I've very impressed with his vision and his passion and his intellect."

At home, Stutzer spends as much time as he can with his daughter. And he urges parents to have honest and frank discussions with their children.

"I came from a household where you would not have expected me to go the route that I went," said Stutzer, who grew up along Island Road in Bristol, Virginia. "I had a good stable household. My parents tried to shield me from everything."

But maybe, he figured, they were too strict.

"My house life was so boring," Stutzer said. "The problem was, they were so strict on me, that it just made everything that there was to get into so luring."

That's why Stutzer figured he started smoking marijuana as young as age 14, which eventually led to many of his other troubles.

"Don't try to treat your kids like little kids. They're smarter than you think," Stutzer said. "They see what's going on. They're exposed to it all. Be real with them about it. And make them feel comfortable where they can talk to you about stuff like that. ... Just be open with them about all of it."

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Red Onion State Prison officer receives Honor Award for Heroism

REGION » A3



Take a ghostly tour of Graham Mansion in Wythe County

A&E » A8

# BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

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## Turkey begins attack in Syria

Trump pulls back US troops, allowing for attack on US-backed Kurdish fighters

BY LEFERIS PITARAKIS and SARAH EL DEEB  
The Associated Press

AKCAKALE, Turkey — Turkey launched airstrikes, fired artillery and began a ground offensive against Kurdish fighters in northern Syria on Wednesday after U.S. troops pulled back from the area, paving the way for an assault on forces that have long been allied with the United States.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced the start of the campaign, which followed the abrupt decision Sunday by U.S. President Donald Trump to essentially abandon the Syrian Kurdish fighters, leaving them vulnerable to a Turkish offensive that was widely condemned around the world.

The decision was a major shift in U.S. policy and drew oppositions from all sides at home. It also marked a stark change in rhetoric by Trump, who during a press conference

See **ATTACK**, Page A11

### INSIDE

» Senate bill could block military sales to Turkey. **A11**

## SPECIAL REPORT DAY 5

# Another chance

Alternative sentencing programs help inmates reenter society

BY DAVID MCGEE  
BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

**B**RISTOL, Va. — An alternative sentencing program for nonviolent offenders is helping reduce overcrowding at the Bristol Virginia Jail, but its future — and the jail's future — require more participation.

In operation since September 2018, the program was designed to relieve jail overcrowding by finding full-time jobs for nonviolent offenders with limited time remaining on their sentences. Participants must pass regular drug screenings, accept full-time employment and not reoffend. All undergo four to six drug tests per month, wear an ankle monitoring bracelet and maintain regular contact with parole officials.

But its participant numbers aren't making enough of an impact in the city's overcrowded jail, Bristol Virginia City Manager Randy Eads said.

The work release program had 17 active participants in July, the most at any time since it began last September, Director

See **CHANCE**, Page A6



ANDRE TEAGUE/BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

Becky Estep talks about her new-found sobriety and the journey through Bristol, Virginia's drug treatment court. "This program saved my life. Before I was incarcerated, I never thought I'd see myself in this spot," Estep said.

## Woman reflects on sobriety gained in program

BY DAVID MCGEE  
BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

**B**RISTOL, Va. — After a blurry, 33-year drug-fueled existence, Becky Estep initially feared the very program she now credits with saving her life.

Now 45, Estep is enrolled in Bristol, Virginia's drug treatment court, a lengthy, monitored recovery option for qualified city jail inmates. She celebrates sobriety by working full time, living independently

and paying the rent of her own apartment — major accomplishments for someone who abused narcotics, rarely worked, didn't complete high school and stole to support herself.

While that life occasionally crosses her mind, in late July, Estep marked four months of being sober when she sat for an interview with the Bristol Herald Courier.

She described the string of

bad decisions that once defined her life and nearly ended it.

"This program saved my life. Before I was incarcerated, I never thought I'd see myself in this spot," Estep said.

Estep smoked crack cocaine before her 12th birthday, injected narcotics into her veins at age 15 and spent the past three decades binging on pain

See **REFLECTS**, Page A7



### CRITICAL MASS

Unlocking the factors behind the jail overcrowding problem in Sullivan County and Bristol, Va.



Cardinals crush Braves, take division title » B1

Thank you, **J Atkins**, for subscribing to the Bristol Herald Courier.

Weather » A10



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**AT HERALDCOURIER.COM**

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- » Photo gallery
- » Video: Officials discuss importance of Bristol, Virginia's drug court program

**COMING FRIDAY**

We examine other causes of jail overcrowding, particularly pretrial inmates

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# Man faces second murder charge

## Sullivan woman killed over weekend was pregnant

BY ROBERT SORRELL  
BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

A woman killed over the weekend in Sullivan County was pregnant, and her ex-boyfriend has now been charged with two counts of first-degree murder, according to a criminal affidavit.

Nathaniel White-Young, 30, of Kingsport, was arrested Monday after his ex-girlfriend, Melissa Mingle, 37, was found un-

conscious in her front yard along Fordtown Road in Colonial Heights. Mingle died Monday, said Capt. Andy Seabolt with the Sullivan County Sheriff's Office.

On Wednesday, Seabolt confirmed that officers discovered that Mingle was pregnant, which has resulted in the second count of first-degree murder.

Sullivan County Detective Eddie McClellan wrote in an affidavit that he learned White-Young, along with the pair's young son,



White-Young

was at the residence on Fordtown Road. A fire had been started inside the residence that was later extinguished by the Warrior's Path Volunteer Fire Department, the detective wrote.

McClellan said a push lawnmower was found upside down inside the living room. A strong odor of gasoline in the residence was detected, he said.

An individual informed police that he spoke with White-Young on Sunday evening.

"He had really messed up by pushing her down and she hit her head, he then started a small fire to get help, he grabbed his son

and left the scene," the affidavit states.

The couple's son was later located and is safe, Seabolt said. White-Young, who has also been charged with aggravated arson, was arrested in Hamblen County.

White-Young is being held without bail at the Sullivan County jail.

This is the 16th murder case currently pending in the Sullivan County court system, according to the district attorney general's office.

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### Current Murder Cases in Sullivan County

**In Criminal Court:**

- 11:** First-degree murder
- 1:** Second-degree murder
- 1:** Criminally negligent homicide
- 2:** Not yet indicted cases

**In General Sessions Court:**

- 1:** First-degree murder

**Note:** Does not include vehicular homicide cases

**Source:** Sullivan County District Attorney General's Office

## SULLIVAN COUNTY AND BRISTOL, VIRGINIA



ANDRE TEAGUE/BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

Bristol Virginia Sheriff David Maples speaks during a town hall Wednesday in Blountville on jail overcrowding in Sullivan County and Bristol, Virginia.

# 'In harm's way'

## Town hall focuses on jail overcrowding in two local lockups

BY ROBERT SORRELL  
BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

BLOUNTVILLE, Tenn. — Drug problems, pretrial inmates, mental health issues, a lack of funding and space, domestic violence and a multitude of other issues have resulted in overcrowded jails in the Mountain Empire, officials said Wednesday evening during a town hall meeting in Blountville.

The Bristol Herald Courier

hosted its "Critical Mass" town hall discussion on overcrowded jails in Bristol, Virginia and Sullivan County, Tennessee. As officials from both sides of the state line gathered at the Sullivan County courthouse, jails in both locations were overcrowded.

On Wednesday, 1,062 inmates were housed at the Sullivan County jail, where the capacity is 619 at the main facility and its extension, according to Chief

Administrator Lee Carswell. In Bristol, Virginia, there were 167 inmates on Wednesday, and the capacity is 67, said city Sheriff David Maples.

"That puts quite a few on the floor," said Maples, adding that the jail often has to deal with a number of mental health patients.

Both localities have options to try to fix the overcrowding

See **TOWN**, Page A5



### CRITICAL MASS

Unlocking the factors behind the jail overcrowding problem in Sullivan County and Bristol, Va.

# Red Onion officer hailed as hero following attack

BY ROBERT SORRELL  
BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

POUND, Va. — A Red Onion State Prison officer is being hailed as a hero after intervening in a potentially fatal attack on a fellow officer.

Officer Tyler Thornsberry, 29, has received Gov. Ralph Northam's Honor Award for Heroism, according to the Virginia Department of Corrections.

The attack occurred on Dec. 2, 2018, at Red Onion, a maximum security prison in Wise County. Thornsberry's quick response probably saved his fellow officer's life, the state said in a news release. The offender, Keith Dwane McDuffie, 32, now faces one count of attempted capital murder, two counts of assault and battery on a corrections officer and one count of possession of an unauthorized weapon by an inmate.

Authorities said the attack occurred as an officer escorted McDuffie from his cell to a recreation area. The man turned and began stabbing the officer



CONTRIBUTED BY THE VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

Red Onion State Prison Officer Tyler Thornsberry receives the governor's Honor Award for Heroism from Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam.

with a weapon made of sharpened plastic, the release states.

Thornsberry walked around a corner and found himself only a few feet from the struggle. He lunged into the situation as the other officer sustained serious stab injuries to the head and chest, the release states.

With his momentum, Thornsberry subdued and restrained the offender.

"There really wasn't much

time to think," he said. "I just reacted based on my training."

Prison Warden Jeffrey Kiser said Thornsberry responded quickly and effectively in a very stressful situation, and he likely saved the officer's life.

"In a critical moment, Officer Thornsberry responded like the well-trained officer that he is. His selflessness and courage in the face of danger make him a true hero," said VDOC Director

Harold Clarke. "The commonwealth of Virginia is incredibly fortunate to have officers like Tyler Thornsberry."

Before joining the Virginia Department of Corrections in February 2018, Thornsberry served for two years as a corrections officer with the Kentucky Department of Corrections, the release states. As a new hire in Virginia, he received 10 weeks of training and spent an additional four to six weeks shadowing other officers.

McDuffie has been incarcerated following a 2008 conviction in Colonial Heights, Virginia. He was sentenced on 22 charges stemming from robberies at three businesses, the Richmond Times-Dispatch reported.

McDuffie, who is now being held at Wallens Ridge State Prison in Big Stone Gap, has two January court dates scheduled in Wise County Circuit Court.

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### Briefly

#### Bristol Virginia schools receive state grant

RICHMOND — Bristol Virginia Public Schools was among six divisions statewide to receive farm-to-school grants, the state Department of Education announced Wednesday.

More than \$133,000 was awarded Wednesday, according to a written statement. The funds will support efforts to incorporate locally grown and raised foods into school nutrition programs and connect students to agriculture through hands-on learning and career exploration. The projects will include teams comprising students, educators and community partners to ensure long-term sustainability.

Bristol will receive \$25,000 to expand fruit and vegetable gardens at four schools and support professional development for teachers and school garden teams, according to the statement.

Buchanan County Public Schools will also receive \$25,000 to purchase greenhouses for four schools. Students will grow fruits and vegetables for use in school nutrition programs and after-school cooking clubs.

Wythe County Public Schools will get \$25,000 to support development of a hydroponic system at Fort Chiswell High to grow lettuce for school nutrition programs at the school and Fort Chiswell Middle School. Grant will also support construction of raised-bed gardens at three elementary schools to grow food for division school nutrition programs.

Other grants went to Cumberland County, Rappahannock County and Richmond Public Schools.

#### Rabies vaccine bait dropped in Tenn., Va.

Oral rabies vaccine bait is being dropped across East Tennessee and Southwest Virginia this month as part of a program with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Wildlife Services.

Low-flying aircraft will distribute small fishmeal-coated packets containing the oral rabies vaccine over the course of a week, which began Wednesday, according to news releases. Targeted wildlife species that consume the bait become vaccinated for rabies.

Distribution areas in Virginia include Bland, Buchanan, Dickenson, Lee, Giles, Grayson, Scott, Smyth, Russell, Washington, Wise, Wythe and Tazewell counties and the cities of Bristol and Abingdon.

In Tennessee, the areas include Sullivan County as well as Washington, Hawkins and Carter counties.

The vaccine products are safe, although officials advise people to leave the bait alone. If bait is in an area where a pet could easily eat it, officials suggest using gloves or a towel to move the bait into a wooded or fencerow area, according to a release from the Tennessee Department of Health. The bait isn't dangerous to pets but can upset a pet's stomach if several are consumed.

From staff reports



# CRITICAL MASS

## Programs offer Sullivan inmates second chance

BY LURAH SPELL  
BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

BLOUNTVILLE, Tenn. — Overcrowding not only causes space and safety issues inside the Sullivan County jail, it leaves little room to offer rehabilitative programs that might prevent inmates from returning to a criminal lifestyle once they're released.

Nevertheless, some programs are offered by community volunteers, including a former inmate. Sullivan County Criminal Court Judge Jim Goodwin and mental health and substance abuse treatment professionals also offer alternative sentencing programs in lieu of jail sentences.

The newest program offered to inmates while they're incarcerated is David Stanley's Moral Reconciliation Therapy program. The cognitive-behavioral treatment program was first implemented at the Shelby County Corrections Center in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1987.

Stanley's MRT program is offered in three phases. The first is a 12-step class to work through moral and behavioral issues. During the second phase, inmates receive specialized vocational training.

The third phase begins near their time of release. They're paired with a mentor who helps them reenter society and stays in contact with them. Stanley's working with a local pastor to put a team of mentors together.

It's values-based and has had "startling results in lowering recidivism" across the U.S., but it requires a "heart change," meaning the inmates have to live with the consequences of their choices and want to change when they're released, Stanley said.

Participants wear a GPS tracking device after their release, much like ankle monitors that are already used, that track where they are and monitor alcohol and drug use. Ankle monitors are available, but some inmates can't afford them, and eligibility is strict, so they're not used as much, said Sheriff Jeff Cassidy and Chief Jail Administrator Lee Carswell.

Stanley's program is in its infancy, so participants haven't made it to the second or third phases. For now, the program is free.

Stanley received his certification to teach MRT classes in 2010. He was an inmate in Sullivan County's jail from 2001-02 on fraud charges. He pleaded guilty and paid restitution, he said.

Under the terms of his probation, Stanley was required to go through MRT.

"It gave me such a foundation and attraction for knowing what to say and how to show other inmates that it isn't enough just to say, 'I'm responsible, your honor,'" Stanley said. "You've got to live with the consequences of your choices, and part of the consequences that we teach in MRT are if you can make something right, you must. ... It was transformative to me ..."

He wanted to bring an MRT program to Sullivan County's jail for years, but when he toured it in July and saw it was "mas-



Sullivan County Criminal Court Judge Jim Goodwin talks about drug court and how it works.

sively, urgently overcrowded," he knew it was time. His visit was the first time he had been there since his release.

"The population and census have increased so much it just tore my heart apart going in there," Stanley said.

Currently, incarcerated women can also take a parenting and personal responsibility class with Linda Brittenham, who has volunteered in the jail for around a decade.

### Alternative sentencing programs

There are two state programs offered in place of jail sentences for inmates who qualify, as determined by prosecutors, Goodwin and Frontier Health professionals.

The Sullivan County Felony Recovery Court program, also known as drug court, began in 2015, and the Tennessee Recovery Oriented Compliance Strategy, or TN ROCS, program began last October. Goodwin, prosecutors, attorneys, Frontier Health professionals and probation officers determine which inmates qualify after they're convicted and supervise them while they're on probation.

The difference between the programs is offenders' risk of recidivism as well as their need for rehabilitation. Recovery Court allows people with non-violent criminal convictions who have a need for substance abuse treatment to receive inpatient and/or outpatient treatment instead of jail.

TN ROCS is for inmates convicted of violent crimes, excluding murder and sex offenses, who have a low need for rehabilitation.

The most common way people end up in TN ROCS is from probation violations, according to Goodwin and Heather Proffit, Frontier Health's Community Justice Program coordinator.

TN ROCS stems from the success of a program created by a judge that led to the creation of the state-funded TN ROCS program model.

Recovery Court and TN ROCS take 18 months to two years to complete, but the time it takes depends on each individual. Goodwin and the treatment professionals determine when participants progress to the next phase based on whether they're ready. Nearly 10 have graduated from Recovery Court so far.

Recovery Court participants undergo regular drug tests, serve hours of community service and attend Narcotics Anonymous meetings, intensive outpatient therapy sessions, MRT classes and court hearings every week. How much of each depends on the level of the program they've reached, and the amount goes down as they progress toward graduation.

For every hour of community service that isn't done when it's supposed to be, Goodwin sends participants back to jail. And if they don't do everything they're supposed to, they can also be sent back to jail.

"It's [TN ROCS] similar to drug court in that if they do well, the incentive is basically that they don't go to jail," Goodwin said. "If they don't do well, there are sanctions, which can be any number of things, including jail."

### Life-changing consequences

During a Recovery Court hearing in August, participants chatted in the Criminal Court courtroom, often joking, while they waited for Goodwin. Five of the six participants had become friends.

Latasha Arnold, 31, of Kingsport, spent nine months in jail on drug charges before entering the program, she said. Her most recent charge was violation of probation in

June. She spent three days in jail then went to Willow Ridge for treatment.

Arnold told the Bristol Herald Courier she smoked marijuana and abused prescription pain pills, but when her three children were taken from her, she began to use more heavily, she said. She hasn't seen them in three years.

"I started doing s--- [drugs] to get them off of my mind, as cruel as that sounds, but it helped a little bit until I was coming down, so I stayed up [high]," Arnold said.

In August, just days before she was due in court, she relapsed. She was visibly nervous thinking about going back to jail.

Ashley Ramey, a fellow Recovery Court participant, told Arnold it's OK to relapse because it's a learning experience, she said.

Ramey graduated last year but had to continue because of a relapse earlier this year, which violated the terms of her probation. She spent three weeks in rehab and around three weeks in jail. Despite her three years in the program, it's changed her life, she said.

"You can tell by the way he [Goodwin] talks to us [that] he cares about us because some of us have been doing it three or four years," Ramey said.

Goodwin told Arnold he was proud of her for being honest about her relapse even though she knew she could get in trouble. He didn't send her to jail.

Arnold is hopeful she can make it through the program and regain custody of her children.

Rebecca White, 40, of Kingsport, also said the program has improved her life. She began May 31 and relapsed once.

"It's actually gave me a chance to figure out who I am and become a better person," White said.

She was in jail from Dec. 28 through May 3 for violating the terms of her probation and was originally convicted on theft charges, she said. As part of the Recovery Court program, she spent 6 1/2 weeks at Willow Ridge.

It was "by the grace of God" that she made it into the program because of its high demand, she said.

"Somebody believed in me," White said.

Dustin Collier, 34, of Kingsport, started the program on Halloween 2016, completed it in December 2018 and graduated in March, he said. He finished serving five years in a state prison before he was transferred to the Sullivan County jail, he said.

Collier spent more than 15 months in the county jail beginning in 2015 on a total of 104 theft and other charges.

"I was very hard-headed when I first got out," Collier said. "I came straight out of prison, so I still had that prison mentality. ... It's [Recovery Court] the only reason I'm not strung out or dead or back in prison. ... It falls on the individual, but they give us the tools."

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## Chance

From Page A1

Allison Arnold said. A total of 31 people have been sentenced into the program, eight completed it and six returned to jail after failing to complete the requirements.

The city jail is certified for 67 inmates, but it typically houses up to 160. The Sheriff's Office estimates it costs about \$62 per day to keep an inmate in the city jail, or about \$22,600 annually. In addition, the city spent an average of \$39 per day per prisoner housing between 50 and 60 additional inmates at the Southwest Virginia Regional Jail in Abingdon. That represented a \$620,000 expense for the financially challenged city during fiscal 2018-19.

"If the judicial alternative sentencing program works as intended, we need to get at least 50 people into that program. Fifty people will make a huge difference — taking people out of the regional jail facility and [allowing] us space to house our own folks at the city jail," Eads said.

"If the judicial alternative sentencing program works, I think we can continue with the city jail for the foreseeable future," Eads said. "However, if it does not work, and we don't get the numbers in there, there will be a hard discussion next budget season as to whether or not this judicial alternative sentencing program is going to continue. It may not make sense for taxpayer dollars to be spent on a program that is not really being effective."

In addition, the city continues operating a drug court program to aid inmates trying to overcome addiction issues while helping them transition back into society.

Since July 2018, the drug court program had 32 participants, including eight graduates, 11 who failed and 13 who are currently enrolled, Arnold said. Forty of its 140 participants have graduated the drug court program since it was established in 2009.

### Judge sees benefits

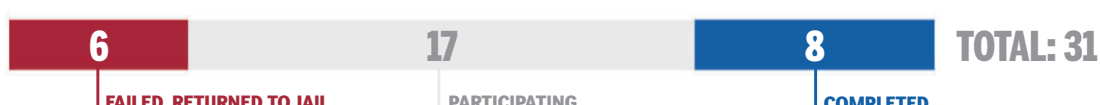
Circuit Court Judge Sage Johnson said he appreciates having sentencing options for those who come before him. He was involved in creating this work reentry program.

"We all agreed that our first concern in regards to prisoners was [that] the public safety was No. 1," Johnson said in August. "After public safety, we agreed to do all we could to reduce the amount incarcerated for those who would follow the rules of the program."

Johnson said he hopes the program will reduce the "revolving door" of the "same faces" coming through his court who are released and soon after violate probation or reoffend and find themselves right back in jail.

"I've been surprised by two things about this program in the first year. One, I really thought when those first inmates went through the program I would be flooded with letters from inmates asking 'How do I get out early?' The other was how many people

## WORK RELEASE PROGRAM SEPTEMBER 2018 - PRESENT



## DRUG COURT PROGRAM JULY 2018 - PRESENT



## DRUG COURT PROGRAM 2009 - PRESENT



SOURCE: ALLISON ARNOLD, DIRECTOR OF WORK RELEASE PROGRAM. BHC GRAPHIC BY CHELSEA GILLENWATER



LEFT: Circuit Judge Sage Johnson said he appreciates having sentencing options for those who come before him. He was involved in creating the drug court program. Johnson said he hopes the program will reduce the "revolving door" of the "same faces" coming through his court.



RIGHT: "If the judicial alternative sentencing program works as intended, we need to get at least 50 people into that program. Fifty people will make a huge difference — taking people out of the regional jail facility and [allowing] us space to house our own folks at the city jail," Bristol Virginia City Manager Randy Eads said.

See JAIL, Page A7

ANDRE TEAGUE/BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

DAVID CRIGGER/BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

# CRITICAL MASS

## Jail

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succeeded. In drug court, about one in three complete the program, and we figured if half in the work program completed it, we'd be doing well," the judge said. "I haven't had that many people express interest as we wanted. But of the people in work reentry, we've only had to terminate three or four. We've had about a 60% to 70% success rate."

The city's drug court has been in place 10 years and had 40 graduates.

"The work reentry program gives these people a chance — a chance to get into a work situation, a chance to get an ID card needed to apply for jobs and a chance to get their driver's license back. It's a good way to get back into society," Johnson said.

### Lightening the load

Sheriff David Maples also strongly supports the program, noting it can be difficult for convicted felons to find jobs.

"We need our [inmate] numbers to come down. The inmates need to be successful so they don't come back. Our hope would be once they finish the program they can keep moving on with that job and do like the rest of us — work, go home tired, go to bed and come in and do it again the next day," Maples said. He added that the program's success benefits everyone — city residents, inmates, the courts, the jail and community.

"The vast majority of folks incarcerated in this jail — more than 90% — will return to the streets at some point," the sheriff said. "As a whole, these people are going to be back out in our community, and we need these people to be successful so we're not talking about an overcrowded jail."

Multiple attempts to speak with Commonwealth's Attorney Jerry Wolfe on this topic were unsuccessful.

### How it works

Participation is voluntary and must be requested by either the prisoner or the defense attorney. Participants cannot have convictions for violent or sexual offenses or assaulting a law enforcement officer, and they must have limited time remaining on their sentences.

"We are largely driven by the attorneys and the offenders requesting evaluation. The attorneys have to apply; we go through an evaluation process. It's not compulsory, it's all voluntary," Arnold said.

All undergo a criminal background check by the commonwealth's attorney's office and, if they pass, their case is referred to Arnold.

"I see where their proposed living address is — it has to be in Bristol, Virginia, Washington County or Bristol, Tennessee.

From there, we move to the courtroom, and the judge will sentence them to the program," she said. "Drug court, we do the same criminal history check and we have clinical evaluations, and Highlands Community Services has evaluations for high-need offenders with drug or alcohol abuse histories. If they meet a certain clinical threshold, we would accept them into drug court."

The city assists with the employment search.

"We don't find the job for them, but we have employers reach out looking for manual labor to welders. From fast food to factory work, we have people scattered everywhere," Arnold said.

At one point this summer, nine participants were working at nine different employers, and four businesses routinely take applications from participants.

### By the numbers

Arnold sees both programs as successful.

"In [fiscal year 2019], the department saved 7,024 incarceration days, which translates to \$274,000 in total savings," Arnold said, based on the regional jail's rate of \$39 per inmate per day,

"keeping in mind that this is our first year of operation, and we're essentially at half capacity as we build our numbers."

Drug court also saved the city the cost of paying for three high-risk pregnancies of women who were using opioids when they became pregnant, and all delivered healthy, non-addicted babies.

"Without drug court, the city would have borne the cost of three high-risk pregnancies. We also have one terminal cancer offender. The cost of his treatment is gone [from the city] because of the program," she said.

Arnold recognizes the city has greater challenges.

"We have a bigger goal. Bristol has a bigger problem; we're No. 1 per capita in drug-driven crime ahead of Richmond and Newport News. It's astounding when you look at the DOC [Department of Corrections] numbers. I mean, we have to do something," Arnold said.

### Participation lasts for months

Participants remain in the work reentry program between three and 12 months, depending on the remainder of their sentence. Drug court participants could be enrolled for up to 18 months, depending on how quickly they progress, Arnold said.

"Drug court, we drug test them 10 to 12 times per month, and the work program we drug-test four to six times per month. Drug court is a more intensive program. Work reentry is more computer-based — we get alerts when they're not where they're supposed to be," Arnold said.

Participants have mostly done what was expected of them, she said. "We've only had one or two compliance issues. People are very happy to be out; they're working, and all but two or three had a job within 10 days of being released. When we started, we thought we'd have to find weeks of community service, but we haven't used much of that at all because they're finding jobs," she said.

"We've only had one or two compliance issues. People are very happy to be out; they're working, and all but two or three had a job within 10 days of being released. When we started, we thought we'd have to find weeks of community service, but we haven't used much of that at all because they're finding jobs," she said.

### Overcrowding spurred program creation

The alternative sentencing program grew out of a 2018 city task force that sought solutions to jail overcrowding and sending a continually rising number of inmates to other facilities, which threatened to derail the city's already delicately balanced budget.

"In December 2017 to January 2018, we realized there was going to be a significant problem with inmate housing cost," Eads said. "A piece of finding the solution for the housing cost was the judicial alternative sentencing program. We got that piece rolling. While we were doing that, we were trying to determine if it would be cheaper for the city to go to the regional jail or keep our current jail. There was a break-even number where we might as well stay with our current jail. That number was 125 inmates. That was the number where you had to start considering the regional jail as opposed to the city jail."

### Survived 2019 chopping block

Arnold calls it a "miracle" the program was started and funded during that time.

The two programs added a net \$399,600 to the city budget for fiscal 2019-20, an increase over last year, when it joined the Veritas drug court program. Its total operating cost is expected to be more than \$526,300, but it is expected to generate more than \$126,700 in fees.

Eads considered eliminating both programs.

"It's not cheap, and I probably spent two hard days this [past] budget season determining whether to cut the program this year. I don't want to throw good money after bad if we're not seeing a return on it. It's doing what I expected right now, but I expect bigger things of it in the future," Eads said.

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ANDRE TEAGUE/BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

Allison F. Arnold, director of the Judicial Alternative Sentencing program (right), talks about the progress of Becky Estep, who is in Phase III of the process. "Past graduates say it's the hardest thing they've ever done because they literally change every single thing about their thinking, their behavior, their friends, their family, where they live, what they do daily with their life," Arnold said. "Every single thing about their life, over the course of drug court, is completely remade into someone who is functional and is doing what they're supposed to do for a healthy life."

## Reflects

From Page A1

and nerve pills, methamphetamine, Suboxone — an opioid marketed to wean addicts off other opioids — Neurontin and nearly anything else. Temporary sobriety only occurred while pulling time in Tri-Cities jails — and even then she was sometimes able to get high.

"I was so used to living the life that I lived, I didn't think I could do anything without drugs. I didn't think I could function around people, I didn't think I could work, I didn't think I could do anything without drugs," Estep said.

Everything centered on her addiction.

"I didn't discriminate; I done it all," she said. "Every day that I could, as much as I could — it wasn't just one drug, it was three or four."

Born in Carter County, Tennessee, she grew up living with her father in Miami, Florida.

"I think I did [drugs] to fit in. My dad was an alcoholic and an addict. I won't take away from him doing a good job raising me. He was a functioning alcoholic, worked every night and he did the best that he could," she said. "I dropped out of school. My dad was smoking crack, and everybody around me was, so I thought, 'If you can't beat them, join them.'"

When she was 13, her father sent her back to East Tennessee to live with her mother, but the self-described "crazy lifestyle" continued unabated. She got in trouble for truancy and was first arrested at age 18.

"I shoplifted. That's how I took care of myself. I was once married, but he's deceased now. We used [drugs] together, and he was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. When he passed, from there on out, I took care of myself shoplifting, skimming and scamming. I held very few jobs my whole life," Estep said.

She can't recall how many times she's been arrested in Carter County, Johnson City, Kingsport and the Twin City.

At one point, she and her late husband were charged with selling narcotics and possession for resale. She was sentenced to four years and granted probation, which she promptly violated within the first month.

"I was faking it to make it throughout the whole program. I was going to be the spokesperson at the graduation, and I caught a charge. I'd violated several times, and the judge finally said he didn't know what to do," she said. "He sent me to Johnson City work camp, and I flattened

[completed] the four [years] in 14 months."

She was arrested again on Christmas Eve 2017 and sentenced to 15 months for possession of Suboxone, shoplifting and giving a false identity to authorities, but she was made a jail trustee and completed her sentence in half the time. However, Bristol, Virginia authorities had a hold on her for a charge of using a false identity during a traffic stop.

"When I got to Bristol, Virginia, you have to wait for court, and every time drugs came in [to jail], I used them. Every time, I was the first one in line," Estep said. "I seen them [drugs] in Bristol, Virginia four times in four months — about once a month."

She said jailers typically recognized behavioral changes and ordered inmates to take a drug screen.

"I would say, 'Don't screen me, I'll melt the cup,'" she said. "I was doing the most."

Drugs aren't uncommon inside penal facilities, Estep said, but there now appear to be fewer getting into local jails.

"It was more common in my younger years. They've got more ways of checking, so it's harder for people to get stuff in. I've seen it in every jail, done it in every jail. Every time it came through the door, I was first in line," she said.

A Bristol, Virginia judge sentenced Estep to four years, but Commonwealth's Attorney Jerry Wolfe recommended her for the city's drug court program.

"When Allison [Arnold, program director] came to see me, I told her I need help. I'm old, and I'm tired, and I need help," Estep said. "When I got locked up, I looked like death choking on a cracker. I was so skinny; I had no life in my eyes. I had burned every bridge with everybody. All my family members were done. I'm the baby, and they've seen me my whole life in my addiction at its worst."

Estep admits now she had no idea how drug court might impact her life.

"When I first took this program, I thought, 'Becky, just do this a year, then you can do whatever the hell you want,'" she admitted. "I've had slips. When you first start this, you go to Highlands [Community Services]. I've never reached out for help. I didn't realize there really were people out here who really do care about you and really want to help you like drug court, the Grace Home, Highlands — they genuinely care and want to see you succeed. That was a whole different life for me. It was very overwhelming at first."

Collectively, they helped Estep face her demons, provided

temporary housing, helped her secure a job and offered support and encouragement.

"The reason we incorporate treatment so heavily at the beginning is when they come off of what they self-medicate with to deal with all those emotions, it's a very tricky time," Arnold said. "We want to give them the resources and the comfort level that — if they're stressed out and don't know how to deal with this [and] want to use — that they can come to us and honestly tell us that. Once they get some coping skills, then they start to move on. They pick up their job; they pick up a place to live. It's pretty amazing when they work it the way Becky wants to work it."

Arnold, who manages the city's alternative sentencing programs, said many participants are not charged with a drug crime but many are drug-driven.

Drug court participants are screened and monitored. They attend classes each week and are required to call in daily, including weekends and holidays, to see if they must take a drug screen — as all are subject to screening at any time. They also work with Highlands counselors to help them resist falling back into destructive patterns. Estep is in the third of the program's four phases.

"When you're messed up, you tend to suppress whatever feelings you have. So when you get sober, it all comes flooding at one time. You discuss a lot of things that are uncomfortable. You pretty much have to tell your life story. ... It's hard to relive that," Estep said. "With my addictions come lying and deceit. Early on in the program, I told the truth and it felt good. It was a weight off my shoulders."

Not everyone completes the program, Arnold said.

"Past graduates say it's the hardest thing they've ever done because they literally change every single thing about their thinking, their behavior, their friends, their family, where they live, what they do daily with their life," Arnold said. "Every single thing about their life, over the course of drug court, is completely remade into someone who is functional and is doing what they're supposed to do for a healthy life."

Estep offers some heartfelt advice for anyone seeking a path to sobriety.

"It's a choice," she said. "You don't have to live this way. There is a better life, but you have to want it though. You have to really, really want it. And it does not come easy."

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"I've had slips. When you first start this you go to Highlands [Community Services]. I've never reached out for help. I didn't realize there really were people out here who really do care about you and really want to help you like drug court, the Grace Home, Highlands — they genuinely care and want to see you succeed. That was a whole different life for me. It was very overwhelming at first."

— Becky Estep, 45, currently enrolled in Bristol, Virginia's drug treatment court

**SYRIA**

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## 2 tied to Giuliani, Ukraine probe arrested

BY MICHAEL BIESECKER, MICHAEL BALSAMO, DESMOND BUTLER and ERIC TUCKER  
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Two Florida businessmen tied to President Donald Trump's lawyer and the Ukraine impeachment investigation were charged Thursday with federal campaign finance violations.

The charges relate to a \$325,000 donation to a group supporting Trump's reelection.

Lev Parnas and Igor Fruman, associates of Rudy Giuliani, were arrested Wednesday trying to board an international flight with one-way tickets at Dulles International Airport in Virginia, according to Geoffrey Berman, the U.S. attorney in Manhattan. No destination was disclosed.

Parnas and Fruman were arrested on a four-count indictment that includes charges of conspiracy, making false statements to the Federal Election Commission and falsification of records. The men had key roles in Giuliani's efforts to launch a Ukrainian corruption investigation against Democratic presidential contender Joe Biden and his son Hunter.

The indictments mark the first criminal charges related to the Ukraine controversy. While they do not suggest wrongdoing by the president, they raise additional questions about how those close to

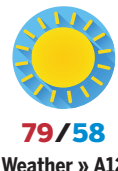
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**INSIDE**



**Cole, Astros beat Rays 6-1 in ALDS Game 5 » B7**

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Weather » A12



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## SPECIAL REPORT DAY 6

# Waiting game

Pretrial inmates make up majority of jail populations



ANDRE TEAGUE/BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

Sullivan County inmates are loaded into transport vans for a trip to Kingsport for court. On this day, 40 inmates were being transported.



## CRITICAL MASS

Unlocking the factors behind the jail overcrowding problem in Sullivan County and Bristol, Va.

BY ROBERT SORRELL | BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

**P**retrial inmates — those who remain incarcerated but have not yet been convicted of a crime — account for a majority of the prisoners housed at the packed jails in Bristol, Virginia and Sullivan County, Tennessee, according to data provided by both facilities.

On Aug. 8, there were 506 pretrial inmates facing felony charges and 138 facing misdemeanor charges for a total of 644 pretrial inmates, according to Sgt. Michael Cole at the Sullivan County Sheriff's Office.

On the same day, there were a total of 970 inmates incarcerated at the county jail, according to Capt. Andy Seabolt. That means pretrial inmates made up more than 66% of the inmate population on Aug. 8.

On the same day in Bristol, Virginia Sheriff David Maples said there were 62 pretrial inmates, including misdemeanor and felony charges, out of a total of 159 inmates housed at the city jail. That means nearly 39% of the total were pretrial inmates.

Combined, 62.5% of inmates in the two jails have yet to be sentenced.

A pretrial inmate is a person who has not made bond, has not been convicted and remains incarcerated. Pretrial inmates ordinarily include any person awaiting trial, being tried or awaiting a verdict, according to a definition by the Cornell Law School.

See **PRETRIAL**, Page A8

### MORE COVERAGE

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- » Guest editorial from David Stanley **A10**

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**COMING SATURDAY**

We look at the role that drugs play in our overcrowded jails.

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# CRITICAL MASS

## Pretrial

From Page A1

Maples noted that the inmates may be awaiting trial and remain in jail for a number of reasons, including court scheduling, investigations and evidence processing.

The magistrate determines the amount of bail, and it's fixed to assure the appearance of the accused and their good behavior pending trial, according to Virginia code. The judicial officer takes into account the nature and circumstances of the offense, whether the person is accused of using a firearm, the weight of the evidence, financial resources and how long they've lived in a community, among other things.

State codes in both Tennessee and Virginia also give a bevy of reasons to deny bail, including the seriousness of the crime, the likelihood the individual will return to court and whether the person was out on bail at the time of the crime of which they were accused.

If a person cannot make bail, they are required to be housed in the local jail pending adjudication.

Once adjudicated, those who were found guilty often wait in local jails until an open bed is available at the state Department of Corrections.

On Aug. 8, the Sullivan County jail housed 149 state inmates, for which the county receives \$39 each per day. Seabolt said it costs the county \$46.66 a day to house inmates, which means money is lost every day.

Maples said there were 46 state inmates in the city jail on Aug. 8. There were also 15 state inmates who had additional pending charges.

The commonwealth of Virginia pays local jails \$12 per day for state inmates, according to the Compensation Board. The state also funds a portion of staff costs and other expenses. It costs the city \$62.39 per inmate per day. Maples and Seabolt said the state corrections departments transfer inmates from local jails to state facilities on a regular basis.

The time period for transfer from a local facility to the Tennessee Department of Correction varies from offender to offender, depending on the circumstances of their case, their location and the security status of each offender, spokesman Robert Reburn said.

As of mid-August, there were beds available for both male and female offenders as TDOC takes them in from across the state on a daily basis, Reburn said. However, TDOC balances intakes to meet the needs of the 95 counties across the state.

Systemwide, the Tennessee department was operating at 95% capacity.

In the TDOC system, offenders undergo a series of evaluations and orientation, Reburn said.

The entire intake process, by policy, should take no more than 14 days in Tennessee, Reburn said.

A spokeswoman for the Virginia Department of Corrections did not respond to questions about that state's process for entering prisoners from counties into state prisons.

Neither Bristol, Virginia nor Sullivan County house federal inmates for long periods of time due to overcrowding. Both jails, however, may house a federal inmate for a short period.

For example, if a federal law enforcement agency arrests a person in Bristol, Virginia, they may be housed briefly at the city jail until they are transferred elsewhere, Maples said.

The city sheriff said a combination of pretrial inmates and state inmates remaining in local jails have resulted in overcrowding locally. Other reasons, including aging facilities, mental health issues, drugs and probation violations, have also increased the population of local jails, Maples added.



On average, 40 to 60 inmates are taken to Kingsport when court is in session. About 20 are moved to Bristol, Tennessee. DAVID CRIGGER/BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

### SULLIVAN COUNTY

On Aug. 8, the Sullivan County jail housed 149 state inmates.

**\$39** < **\$46.66**

Amount the county receives each day from the state

Amount it costs the county each day to house state inmates

### THE COST OF STATE INMATES

### BRISTOL, VIRGINIA

On Aug. 8, there were 46 state inmates. There were 15 state inmates with more pending charges.

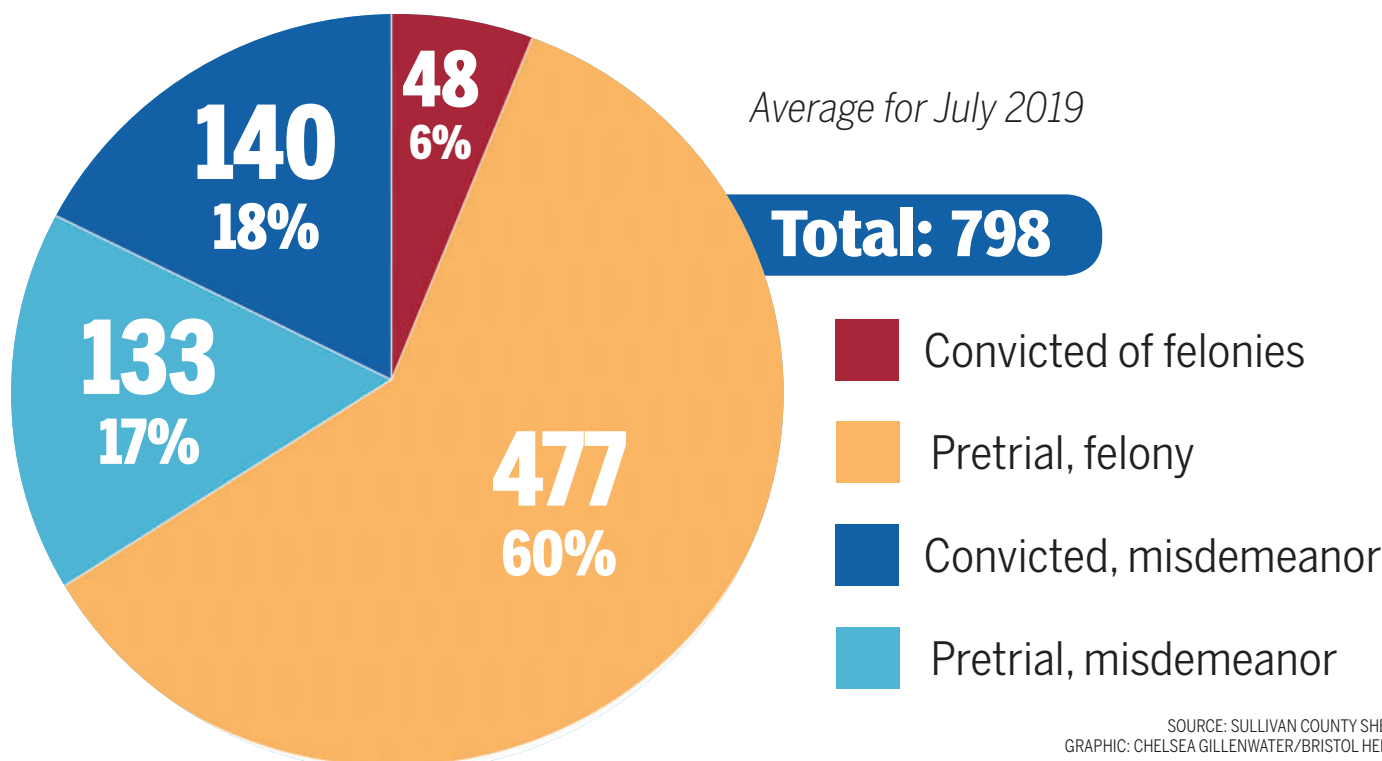
**\$12** < **\$62.39**

Amount state pays local jails each day for state inmates

Amount it costs the city each day to house state inmates

## FELONIES VS. MISDEMEANORS

### SULLIVAN COUNTY



SOURCE: SULLIVAN COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE  
GRAPHIC: CHELSEA GILLENWATER/BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

## Pretrial Services agency works with Virginia inmates

BY DAVID MCGEE  
BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

Virginia's General Assembly established the Pretrial Services division in 2013 as a grant-funded agency that provides free pretrial and probation services for people charged with both felony and misdemeanor crimes.

The cities of Bristol and Norton, along with Buchanan, Dickenson, Lee, Russell, Scott, Smyth, Tazewell, Washington and Wise counties, are served by Southwest Virginia Community Corrections and its Pretrial Services division. All except Bristol are part of the Southwest Virginia Regional Jail Authority, which means Bristol contracts for its services and pays 25% of the cost.

The agency currently supervises almost 1,700 active defendants who are out of confinement on some sort of bond, according to Josh Kiser, pretrial coordinator for Southwest Virginia Community Corrections.

In Bristol, Virginia the pretrial agency worked with 75 such defendants during the first six months of 2018-19, the most recent complete figures available.

At the Bristol Virginia Jail on July 19, 61 of 152 inmates were classified as pretrial and another 28 were being held on a probation violation charge — meaning a total of 89 were not yet sentenced. Of the 65 city prisoners held at other facilities that same day, 18 were classified as pretrial and seven were held on probation violation — bringing the city's total to 114 of 217 or 52.5%.

### How the agency functions

When someone is arrested in Virginia, a

pretrial services officer conducts an interview and fills out a risk assessment form designed to ascertain whether the person is a flight risk or a danger to the community. The assessment determines whether the person has ties to the community, what they are charged with and if they have family nearby or a place to live. A criminal background check is performed, and the report is then submitted to the jurisdictional court.

One of the program's primary goals is to alleviate jail overcrowding.

"We don't make the recommendation [regarding bond]," said Josh Kiser, pretrial coordinator for Southwest Virginia Community Corrections. "We enter all the information into the system. ... It just makes a recommendation to release or detain, not the type of bond. It says whether the defendant needs to be released or detained based on criminal history, if they have ties to the community and are a flight risk."

A pretrial felon is defined as someone who has been arrested and charged with at least one felony count and subject to a sentence of one or more years. When arraigned, a judge typically sets bail based on the seriousness of the charges and the defendant's prior criminal record. In many cases, the defendant or his or her family would have to pay 10% of the bond to be released.

Bond is set at the discretion of judges and magistrates in connection with local commonwealth's attorneys, Kiser said, and can be secured or unsecured, meaning the amount is paid before a defendant is re-

leased, whereas unsecured bonds only need to be paid if the defendant fails to show up in court.

In Southwest Virginia, judges typically issue more secured bonds than unsecured.

At the time of the interview in early August, Kiser said the agency was monitoring 923 defendants charged with felony crimes and 177 with misdemeanor charges on secured bonds, compared to 349 felony and 153 misdemeanor defendants on unsecured bonds. Another 66 were out on personal recognizance bonds, including 50 with felony charges.

"That [assessment form] is to help them [judges] make a more informed bond decision. It's up to the judge, the commonwealth's attorney and defense attorney to figure out if it needs to be a secured or unsecured bond. Secured bond happens all over the state. Some localities give more unsecured than secured bond, and some will not give unsecured bond," Kiser said.

A November 2018 report by the Virginia State Crime Commission said the state's Pretrial Services program could be used as a substitute for cash bail for the indigent.

It found the pretrial process "varies by locality and can differ amongst courts within the same locality." Additionally, it said first appearance procedures vary by time waiting to appear before a judge, parties present, use of technology and consideration of bond.

# CRITICAL MASS

## Local jails filling up with mental health patients

BY ROBERT SORRELL  
BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

With a lack of services in the community, more mental health patients are finding their way into jails in the Mountain Empire.

“We’ve become the mental holding facility,” said Sullivan County Chief Jail Administrator Lee Carswell. “Since they closed a lot of the mental health facilities down, they stick them with us.”

In the past decade, Tennessee has decreased the number of available beds at state mental health institutes.

The Lakeshore Mental Health Institute in Knoxville closed in 2012. The facility provided mental health services for Northeast Tennessee for 126 years.

At the time of the closing, then-Tennessee Department of Mental Health Commissioner Doug Varney proposed expanding community services by leveraging existing contracts with Covenant Health’s Peninsula Hospital, Johnson City’s Woodridge Hospital and Ridgeview Behavioral Health Services in Oak Ridge.

Mental health facilities in Virginia, including the 179-bed Southwestern Virginia Mental Health Institute in Marion, have been at or near capacity. On a few occasions this year, the Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services has warned it would run out of beds.

With few places to go, many people with mental health issues end up incarcerated in local jails.

“There’s no other place for these people to go,” said Carswell, whose jail in Blountville has been overcrowded for years.

Sullivan County’s jail averages about 80 mental health requests per month, according to Christy Frazier, the department’s health administrator.

In 2015, the average mental health requests, when inmates ask to speak to the mental health nurse, were 57 per month. Currently, about 15% of the jail population is on mental health medications, she said.

“Most are addiction, but far too [often] the need for recourses for severe mental health disabilities and dementia are overshadowed by the addiction,” Frazier said. “Both the severe mental health disabilities and dementia inmates are often very difficult for officers and medical staff to take care of, and incarceration is not the proper facility to house them long-term. They require a significant portion of staff time.”

Frazier said she does not know how the closing of the Lakeshore mental health facility affected the local jail, primarily because the jail’s average daily population has increased.

“I would honestly love to know the services that Lakeshore offered to our inmates because, currently, there are very few long-term facilities for severe mental disabilities,” Frazier said. “This issue is significant to our communities, often leaving them homeless with their best option of residency, sadly, jail.”

The Bristol Virginia Jail, which is at more than double its capacity, also has had a number of inmates with mental health issues.

In the city, the Police Department handles emergency custody orders, which occur when someone is taken to a local hospital to be checked for possible mental health issues — which would keep them out of jail. The Sheriff’s Office handles temporary detention orders, which occur when someone is taken to a treatment facility, often to locations outside the city.

Maples said his department has dealt with people of all ages, including an 8-year-old.

### SURVEY RESULTS

Each year, the Virginia Compensation Board distributes a mental health survey for completion by local and regional jails. In 2018, the survey was completed in June. Here are the results:

#### Bristol City Jail

Inmates with schizophrenia or delusional disorders: **8**

Bipolar or major depression: **10**

Mild depression: **21**

Anxiety disorder: **9**

Post-traumatic stress disorder: **17**

Inmates receiving antipsychotic medications: **24**

Mood disorder medications: **7**

Antidepressant medications: **9**

Antianxiety medications: **3**

#### Southwest Virginia Regional Jail system

Inmates with schizophrenia or delusional disorders: **17**

Bipolar or major depression: **74**

Mild depression: **279**

Anxiety disorder: **69**

Post-traumatic stress disorder: **60**

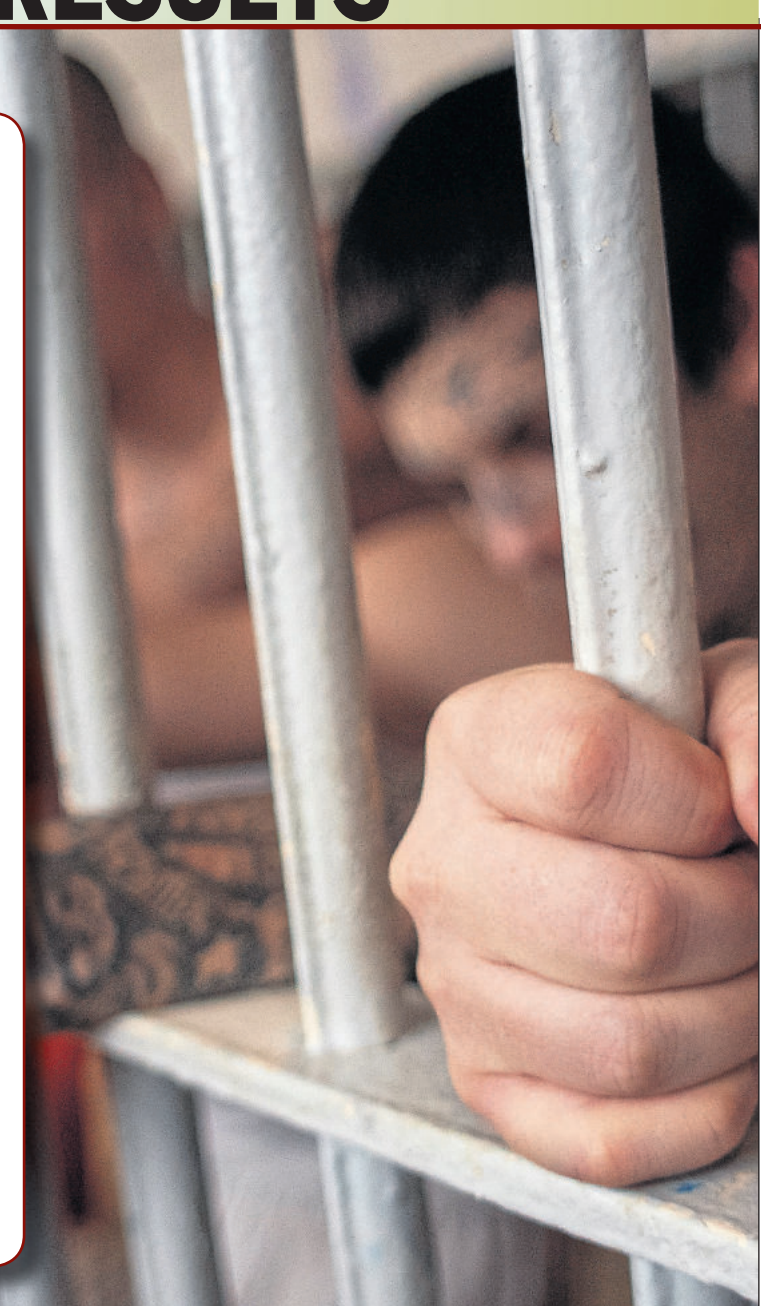
Other mental illness: **49**

Inmates receiving antipsychotic medications: **103**

Mood disorder medications: **35**

Antidepressant medications: **900**

Antianxiety medications: **195**



SOURCE: VIRGINIA COMPENSATION BOARD; PHOTO: ANDRE TEAGUE/BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

Fiscal year 2018 resulted in \$533,789 worth of mental health services and medications at the regional jail while it cost \$184,000 at the Bristol Virginia Jail.



DAVID CRIGGER/BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

Abi Brace, 32, is a nurse in the Sullivan County jail. The jail averages about 80 mental health requests per month, according to Christy Frazier, the department’s health administrator.

“Most are addiction, but far too [often] the need for recourses for severe mental health disabilities and dementia are overshadowed by the addiction. Both the severe mental health disabilities and dementia inmates are often very difficult for officers and medical staff to take care of, and incarceration is not the proper facility to house them long-term. They require a significant portion of staff time.”

— Christy Frazier, Sullivan County jail’s health administrator

“I’m not a mental health specialist,” Maples said. “We’re going to carry out our duties.”

The city of Bristol is working with Highlands Community Services of Abingdon to treat some of the jail’s inmates who have mental health issues.

Highlands provides mental health, substance use and developmental services to the residents of Washington County and Bristol Virginia.

While the National Institute of Mental Health estimates that approximately 4.5% of adults in the U.S. suffer from serious mental illness, comparable

figures in Virginia prisons and jails are 16% and 17%, the Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services reports.

Numbers in Tennessee aren’t known, but some jails estimate up to 20% of the people incarcerated suffer from a mental illness.

The department in Virginia says it is generally

accepted knowledge that there is a higher prevalence of individuals with behavioral health disorders in jail and prisons than in the general public.

The National Alliance on Mental Illness says that in a

mental health crisis, people are more likely to encounter police than get medical help. As a result, 2 million people with mental illness are booked into jails each year, the organization estimates.

Nearly 15% of men and 30% of women booked into jails have serious mental health conditions.

The Marshall Project, a nationwide nonprofit criminal justice program, said experts don’t fully understand why such a gender disparity exists. One expert told the Marshall Project that women may be more inclined than men to report psychological distress.

Once in jail, many individuals don’t receive the treatment they need and end up getting worse. They stay longer than their counterparts without mental illness. They are also at risk of victimization, the alliance states.

After leaving jail, many no longer have access to needed health care and benefits. A criminal record often makes it hard for individuals to get a job or housing. Many, especially those without access to mental health services and support, wind up homeless or in emergency rooms and are often rearrested.

At least 83% of jail inmates with a mental illness did not have access to needed treatment, according to the national alliance.

Jailing people with mental illness creates huge burdens on law enforcement, corrections and state and local budgets. It does not protect public safety. And people who could be helped are being ignored, the alliance added.

Each year, the Compensation Board in Virginia distributes a mental health survey for completion by local and regional jails. In 2018, the survey was completed in June, according to an annual report by the Compensation Board.

The inmates received the survey between 24 hours and seven days of incarceration, the report states. It showed a large number of inmates with mental disorders at both jails.

In addition, the report also indicated whether inmates

#### BY THE NUMBERS

**2 million**

Number of people with mental illness booked into jails each year in the U.S.

**15%**

Percentage of men with serious mental issues who are booked into jails each year.

**30%**

Percentage of women with serious mental issues who are booked into jails each year.

**\$533,789**

Amount spent on mental health services and medications in fiscal year 2018 at the Southwest Virginia Regional Jail.

**\$184,000**

Amount spent on mental health services and medications in fiscal year 2018 at the Bristol Virginia Jail.

SOURCES: National Alliance of Mental Alliance, Compensation Board of Virginia

were veterans or homeless. At the Bristol lockup, there were seven veterans, including two with a mental illness, and six homeless inmates, including five with an illness.

Five veterans were listed at the regional jail, and two had a mental illness. There were also nine homeless individuals, including three with a mental illness.

A large number of inmates also received medication for mental health issues, including 24 receiving antipsychotic medication at the Bristol Virginia Jail compared to 103 at the Southwest Virginia Regional Jail.

Fiscal year 2018 resulted in \$533,789 worth of mental health services and medications at the regional jail while it cost \$184,000 in Bristol, according to the Compensation Board.

Costs for Tennessee mental health services in jails are not available.

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**WORLD:** Turkish forces advance in Syria as US troops come under fire » A5

**Central gets much-needed win over East**



**HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL SPORTS » B1**



**Union hands Ridgeview its first defeat**

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**Impeachment Investigation**

## Former envoy defies Trump

Diplomat testifies president pushed to oust her from post

BY MARY CLARE JALONICK, MATTHEW LEE and ALAN FRAM  
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Testifying in defiance of President Donald Trump's ban, former U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine Marie Yovanovitch told House impeachment investigators Friday that Trump himself had pressured the State Department to oust her from her post and get her out of the country.

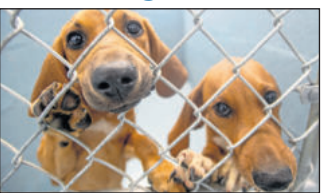
Yovanovitch told lawmakers investigating Trump's dealings with Ukraine that there was a "concerted campaign" against her based on "unfounded and false claims by people with clearly questionable motives."

The diplomat was recalled from Kyiv as Rudy Giuliani — who is Trump's personal attorney and has no official role in the U.S. government — pressed Ukrainian officials to investigate baseless corruption allegations against Democrat Joe Biden and his son Hunter, who was involved with a gas company there.

Yovanovitch testified behind closed doors Friday for more than nine hours as part of the House Democrats' impeachment investigation. Her

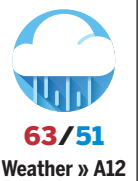
See **TRUMP**, Page A12

### INSIDE



**Dogs recovered from hot car 'doing great' » A3**

Thank you, **K.T. Craighead**, for subscribing to the Bristol Herald Courier.



Weather » A12



## SPECIAL REPORT DAY 7

# 'Vicious cycle'

Lawyers: As drug addiction rises, rehabilitative resources needed



ANDRE TEAGUE/BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

**A Sullivan County Sheriff's Office jailer watches the video cameras that monitor the crowded conditions of the jail facilities in Blountville.**

BY TIM DODSON | BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

**W**hat do 75% to 85% of the inmates in the Sullivan County, Tennessee and Bristol, Virginia jails have in common? ♦ Drugs, according to the two sheriffs. ♦ An overwhelming majority of inmates are impacted by illicit drugs or face charges that tie into drugs — either directly or indirectly, local officials say. ♦ As Sullivan County and Bristol, Virginia grapple with overcrowded jails and the role that drugs play, those working in the local criminal justice system say the situation raises questions about how the community will break what one attorney calls a "vicious cycle of addiction."

"Drugs take [people] down a path that ends [with] them back here," Bristol Virginia Sheriff David Maples said at his office at the city jail. "And they can't seem to break the cycle. They promise they'll never be back, but they continue to come back."

Available data makes it difficult to quantify the precise impact of drug cases on overcrowding and the number of inmates with substance use disorders, but both Bristol, Virginia and Sullivan County report a growing number of drug-related arrests.

And while opioids often receive the bulk of attention, local police report that a rising number of methamphetamine cases pose a new challenge.

Further compounding the overcrowding issue, lawyers say, are limited rehabilitation resources for helping people overcome substance use disorders and stay out of jail.

"The ripple effect of drugs



### CRITICAL MASS

Unlocking the factors behind the jail overcrowding problem in Sullivan County and Bristol, Va.

is far and wide," said Kimberly Mumpower, a criminal defense attorney with the Holston Legal Group in Abingdon. She sits on the drug court team in Bristol, Virginia and previously worked as a prosecutor.

Like many other attorneys, she sees cycles of addiction and recidivism play out in defendants' lives.

"When they are sitting in a local jail, they are not getting treatment," she said. "And so then it's kind of this vicious cycle of incarceration — they are clean, they get out, they're clean, start using again, committing offenses to either sup-

port their habit to get money ... or get caught for possession and then back in jail."

### 'The biggest problem right now'

A decade ago, Sullivan County reported 19 meth-related arrests while Bristol, Virginia saw only a handful — six — in 2009.

But over the years, that number steadily climbed in both localities, reaching 74 arrests in Bristol, Virginia in 2018, and 653 in Sullivan County the same year.

See **DRUGS**, Page A6

### MORE COVERAGE

#### INSIDE

- » Overcrowding a problem even as early as 1917 **A3**
- » Couple back together after drug court, rehab **A7**
- » Female inmates increasing due to drugs **A7**
- » Facebook readers share stories, comments on jail overcrowding series **A11**
- » A word cloud detailing common words our Facebook readers used for the jail problem **A11**

#### ONLINE

Follow this series with photos, videos, articles, graphics, a podcast and more at **HeraldCourier.com**. If you missed it, watch video of our town hall on jail overcrowding at **HeraldCourier.com**.

#### COMING SUNDAY

What's next for efforts to ease overcrowding in Sullivan County and Bristol, Virginia?

**INSIDE: CLASSIFIED B10-12 | COMICS B8 | DEATHS A4 | OPINION A11 | SCOREBOARD B2 | TELEVISION B9**

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# CRITICAL MASS

## Drugs

From Page A1

"Meth is the biggest problem right now," Sullivan County District Attorney General Barry Staubus said.

What's driving the rising number of meth cases? Law enforcement leaders say they are seeing fewer homemade meth labs and more of the drug coming from outside the community. Staubus and Sullivan County Sheriff Jeff Cassidy said a large portion of meth originates in Mexico and comes through Atlanta. "It's cheaper, and it's stronger," Cassidy said in an interview at his Blountville office.

Sgt. Steve Crawford with the Bristol Virginia Police Department said Bristol's proximity to a major transportation corridor, Interstate 81, is also a factor.

The Virginia Criminal Sentencing Commission's annual 2018 report underscored the magnitude of the issue in the local criminal justice system when compared to the rest of the state. The 28th Circuit — which includes the city of Bristol and Washington and Smyth counties — saw 238 meth convictions in fiscal year 2018, the third highest in the state, following the 27th Circuit near Radford, which had 259 convictions, and the 25th Circuit near Staunton, which had 249, according to the report.

Population estimates from the Weldon Cooper Center at the University of Virginia show the three localities in the 28th Circuit made up only about 1.19% of Virginia's population in 2018, 101,344 out of more than 8.51 million people. But with its 238 meth convictions, the Bristol area made up 13.9% of the commonwealth's 1,708 meth convictions last year.

Some more populous jurisdictions saw far fewer meth-related convictions. For example, the 19th Circuit in Northern Virginia, which includes Fairfax County and the city of Fairfax, had a population of about 1.17 million in 2018, about 13.7% of the state's population. The report documented 20 meth convictions from this circuit.

However, the commission's 2018 report cautioned that convictions listed in a table in the report were not adjusted to reflect a standard measure accounting for each locality's population and that the number of convictions may not be the best measure of drug issues across communities. Conviction counts may reflect the success of law enforcement, and other metrics like drug overdoses and arrests that don't lead to convictions may also provide insight, the report noted.

Bristol Virginia Commonwealth's Attorney Jerry Wolfe did not return a request for comment for this article.

Generally, police say drugs can tie into other types of crime. However, the number of drug-related cases on paper and what someone is ultimately charged with may not reflect how many crimes are drug-related.

"It's hard to put a number on how many crimes are committed because of drugs," Crawford said.

For example, someone may have been arrested for robbery — but they may have also committed theft to purchase drugs.

Identify theft, elder abuse and domestic violence can also tie into drugs, Staubus said.

Both localities reported

## AVERAGE INMATE DEMOGRAPHICS

■ Averages from Bristol Virginia Jail and the Sullivan County jail  
■ Data available from the Sullivan County jail only

Age: 36-37

Height: 5'11"

Weight: 175 lbs.

Race: White

Crime Level: Felon

Status: Pretrial

Employment: Unemployed

Education: High school or GED

Crime: Drug Violations

Born in: Tennessee

Marital Status: Single

### Rehab and addiction treatment facilities

#### Residential facilities

- » Willow Ridge, Johnson City, Tennessee
- » Magnolia Ridge, Johnson City
- » James H. Quillen VA Medical Center, Johnson City
- » Comprehensive Community Services, Kingsport, Tennessee
- » Life Center of Galax, Galax, Virginia

#### Outpatient facilities

- » Bristol Regional Counseling Center, Bristol, Tennessee
- » Highlands Community Services, Abingdon, Virginia
- » Families Free Inc., Johnson City
- » Holston Counseling Services, Kingsport
- » East Tennessee Recovery, Johnson City
- » Dragonfly Medical and Behavioral Health, Johnson City
- » Catalyst Health Solutions, Johnson City

Source: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

(Some substance use disorder treatment facilities do not appear on SAMHSA's database, including Creekside Behavioral Health in Kingsport, which offers inpatient and outpatient services, and ReVIDA Recovery Centers in Abingdon, which provides outpatient services for people with opioid use disorder.)

an increasing number of drug-related arrests in recent years. Between 2014 and 2018, Bristol, Virginia saw a rise from 73 drug-related arrests to 157. In that same five-year period, Sullivan County's figure rose from 1,114 to 1,985.

But local officials note that, contrary to what may be a common perception, they don't believe the jails are full of first-time drug offenders or people caught for simple possession — many inmates violated probation or face a number of other charges.

### Overcrowding and a 'vicious cycle of addiction'

Defense attorneys point to additional factors that may contribute to overcrowding.

In Virginia, it often takes several months for state labs to analyze a substance in drug cases that require a state lab analysis.

A large backlog of controlled substance cases plagues the state's Department of Forensic Science. The drug cases completed in August had an average turnaround time of 135 days, ac-

ording to the department's website. As of Sept. 1, the department's backlog was 12,318 cases, said Katya N. Herndon, the department's chief deputy director.

Backlogged controlled substance cases include 80 from the Bristol Virginia Police Department and 151 from the Washington County Sheriff's Office, Herndon said. The state's Western Laboratory, which would usually analyze cases from the local area, had an average turnaround time of 122 days for its cases in August.

Lawyers say they've seen this process take six to nine months to complete.

"Oftentimes, people are held without bond at the time of arrest, and then there's a delay due to that certificate [of analysis] where the case has to be continued," said Mumpower, the Abingdon-based attorney. "We as attorneys try to obtain bonds for our clients. Sometimes, they can make the dollar amount of the bond."

Virginia offers pretrial services, which is similar to a probation period, while a defendant is out on bond and awaiting hearings. Defendants are required to check in with a pretrial services officer, who conducts random drug screens.

Some lawyers say this system may set some defendants up for failure, particularly if a client is addicted to a substance.

"The problem I have seen with pre-trial services is that drug offenders cannot stop using just because a Judge 'orders' them to stop," defense attorney Heather Howard wrote in an email answering questions from the Bristol Herald Courier.

Howard, who works with the Abingdon-based firm Jessee, Read & Howard, previously served as a prosecutor in Russell and Washington counties. She's prosecuted and defended hundreds of drug-related cases over the years, she said.

"In my experience, defendants who suffer from methamphetamine addictions are almost guaranteed to violate their bond conditions and continue to use methamphetamine because of the highly addictive nature of the drug and the nature of the disease of addiction," she wrote. "If

the defendant continues to use narcotics and provides a dirty urine screen to the pre-trial officer, the judge will revoke bail and the defendant will be re-incarcerated pending trial. This ultimately results in the defendant's friends/family losing the bail money they paid to a bondsman to secure the defendant's release on pre-trial services."

Mumpower offered a similar observation.

"It's the vicious cycle of addiction where they get out on bond, but then they start using drugs again during pretrial, so their bond is revoked and then they are back in jail still awaiting trial," Mumpower said.

Julie Canter, a defense attorney in Sullivan County and a former assistant district attorney in the locality, said some drug cases require jail time.

"Even a simple possession misdemeanor methamphetamine charge carries mandatory 30 days in jail, so you're looking at mandatory jail time," she said.

Jail overcrowding, Canter said, "needs to be addressed and faced head-on."

"It's either going to result in perhaps more funding for jails, and then if that doesn't occur, I think there's potential for civil liability that's also going to result in money being expended. It's not something that you can ignore," she added.

### 'We can't just jail our way out of the issue'

Faced with overcrowded facilities and a myriad of drug-related issues, many in the local criminal justice system say what amounts to an all-hands-on-deck approach is needed for meaningful changes.

"You can't just rely on one entity to take on that problem and to solve it. It's going to take all of us," said Lt. Clay Robinette with the Bristol Virginia Police Department. "It's going to take medical, it's going to take law enforcement, it's going to take social services, it's going to take everybody working together."

Cassidy, Sullivan County's sheriff, said the criminal justice system needs to enforce the law, but rehabilitative resources are part of the solution — a common sentiment shared by many who work with drug cases. "We can't just jail our way

out of the issue," said Allison Arnold, director of Bristol, Virginia's Judicial Alternative Sentencing Program.

"We can't build enough jails — that's not treatment. You have to have treatment," Arnold added.

Both Sullivan County and Bristol, Virginia have drug court programs that aim to help defendants overcome substance addictions.

In Bristol, Virginia, potential participants must meet certain qualifications — they can't have previously been convicted of a violent or sex-based offense. The voluntary program is rigorous — participants attend multiple treatment and support groups each week and submit to random drug testing.

"It's not an easy program; it would be very difficult for a lot of just sober, working people to have to keep all of the balls in the air that we require the drug court folks to do," said Arnold, who works with the drug court program.

And it's a small number of defendants who participate and succeed in the programs.

Attorneys point to a number of areas where resources may be lacking.

As far as drug courts go, Howard said more state funding is needed in Virginia for judges dedicated only to drug court dockets, as well as for drug court prosecutors and defense attorneys. Funds are also needed for local community services boards to provide mental health and addiction support, she said.

Without more dedicated drug court funding, "it appears that Drug Courts may be valuable on a human level, yet not particularly effective at reducing jail overcrowding," Howard wrote.

She also sees a need for more funding for probation officers to assist defendants in getting mental health treatment to overcome addiction.

Mumpower said affordable inpatient treatment facilities, as well as housing for people who are homeless or need a safe and supportive place to stay as they deal with addiction should be part of the solutions.

No inpatient residential treatment facilities currently operate in Bristol. Arnold said drug court participants in Virginia have gone to The Laurels in Lebanon and the Life Center of Galax. In Tennessee, the closest residential facilities are Magnolia Ridge and Willow Ridge, which Frontier Health operates in Johnson City. Comprehensive Community Services also offers residential treatment in Kingsport.

Several facilities in the Tri-Cities area provide outpatient services for people with substance use disorders. However, there's only one such site in Bristol: the Bristol Regional Counseling Center operated by Frontier Health, according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA's) database of facilities.

Most of SAMHSA's listed sites cluster around Johnson City, although there are some exceptions, like Highlands Community Services in Abingdon.

Even when facilities are close to a person struggling with a substance use disorder, others barriers to treatment can include waitlists for care and a lack of transportation.

"The most dangerous situation is someone just getting out of jail and then not having treatment," said Matthew Caffrey, a physician at Dragonfly Medical and Behavioral Health in Johnson City.

If someone has a substance use issue when they go to jail, their tolerance can diminish during their sentence. If an inmate doesn't receive treatment, Caffrey said, when that person is released, they may try to use the same amount of the drug that they used before — which could be a potentially fatal dose.

Caffrey and his wife, Alicia Caffrey, a clinical psychologist at the same clinic, said they have several patients who formerly served jail sentences, and both are concerned about whether inmates in jails throughout the region can access treatment while behind bars.

The Bristol, Virginia jail does not have a policy limiting the kinds of treatments its physician can administer, Lt. Keith Pensinger said. With the jail physician's order, inmates there can also access Medication Assisted Treatment, which is commonly used for treating opioid use disorders.

The Sullivan County jail has detox protocols in place but does not offer Medication Assisted Treatment "for the safety and security of the inmate and the facility," according to Christy Frazier, a health administrator with the sheriff's office. However, the Sullivan jail administers buprenorphine — a drug used to treat opioid dependency — to pregnant inmates if they have an active prescription, Frazier said.

With limited local resources dedicated to rehabilitation, several nonprofits and faith-based organizations have also stepped up to offer aid, like classes and support groups.

"It is going to take a community to change a community," said Mark Mitchell, executive director of Tri-Cities Recovery, a nonresidential recovery program with a spiritual focus. Mitchell has been involved with leading programming for inmates in the local jails.

Scott Emerine, associate pastor of the Covenant Fellowship Church of God in Bristol, Virginia, said his church has supported programs like Tri-Cities Recovery and other initiatives, like Jobs for Life. The church is looking at starting a transition house, Emerine said.

"It is important for us to give people the tools necessary to fully recover from a life of addiction. Helping them overcome the addiction is the first part of the process. Helping them find gainful employment and a fresh start is equally important. If we can do these things correctly, this should help decrease recidivism, and the overcrowding situation in the jails," Emerine wrote in an email.

But some leaders said the issue isn't just a matter of resources — inmates and defendants also must decide whether to seek help with programs and initiatives.

"Sometimes, just throwing tons of resources at something doesn't fix the problem," said Maples, the sheriff in Bristol, Virginia. "The individual has got to want to change."

But taking steps toward overcoming substance use and addiction can be difficult, particularly if someone has experienced past trauma and other underlying issues.

"Addiction is a disease, it is a lifelong treatment, and because of that, you do see some recidivism," Canter said. "You work hard to try to help your clients, and you try to do what you can to see that they don't fall prey to that, but again, it's a disease. It requires a lifelong effort."

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# CRITICAL MASS

## As female inmate population rises, advocates and women say public health solutions needed

BY TIM DODSON  
BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

BLOUNTVILLE, Tenn. — When Amber Neece spoke on the phone with her daughter earlier this year, she had some tough news to deliver.

She wouldn't be released from the Sullivan County jail as soon as she hoped — instead of a late September release, her time was extended into November after she lost trusty status. Records show she failed a drug test in July while behind bars, according to the county Sheriff's Office.

"Now you don't get to see me in my Halloween costume," Neece recalls her 10-year-old daughter saying.

"That right there broke my heart," said Neece, who said she was jailed after violating the conditions of her probation when she failed a drug test and didn't pay some required fines.

The 30-year-old mother is one of a growing number of female inmates contributing to the overcrowding problem at the Sullivan County lockup.

Neece has been on what she called "a roller-coaster ride in and out of jail" on drug-related violations throughout her 20s. She struggled with addiction to pain pills following a car wreck when she was 17 and eventually started using methamphetamine.

The Kingsport resident said she needs to take care of her daughter, a niece and nephew because her parents are getting older and can't do it on their own.

"And I'm sitting stuck in here because of my decisions — it's pretty rough," she said on an August evening at the jail.

Despite previously spending time in jail, she said the experience this time around "broke" her. "There's so many people here, it's crazy," she said.

Her cell regularly has 30-40 women crammed in, and many have different sleep schedules. Personality clashes and tight quarters can lead to altercations, she said.

During a tour of the jail, she was one of 276 women behind bars at the main jail, whose capacity is 143. Overall, the jail's two facilities in Blountville — the main jail and the "extension" — are supposed to hold no more than 619 inmates, though the total number has jumped past 1,000 in recent months. No women are held in the extension.

During a tour of the main jail, Lee Carswell, jail administrator, opened a metal door to one of the women's cells. The women sat on bunk beds and sleeping mats spread out on the floor.

Like other cells throughout the jail, the women had little privacy or personal space.

In total that night, Sullivan County had 1,011 inmates, including men and women.

"I never thought I would see that," Carswell said as he pointed to a board with the inmate counts written in black marker. He circled the 1,011 with his finger.

### A surging number of female inmates

As Sullivan County contends with an overcrowded jail, data shows a surge in female inmates in recent years is adding to the problem.

The average daily female inmate population grew 63.3% between 2010 and 2019, from 153 female inmates to 250, according to data presented to Sullivan County leaders in July. This is more than three times the growth rate in the average daily population for male inmates, which increased by 20.5% — from 595 to 717 — for the same period.

Across the state border, the Bristol Virginia Jail also has an overcrowding issue. The jail was built to house 20 female inmates, and it regularly has a female population in the middle 20s to lower 30s — so the magnitude of the issue is more pronounced in Sullivan County.

Locally, the growing number

of incarcerated women fits with some national trends. One analysis by The Sentencing Project, a nonprofit that advocates for "a fair and effective U.S. criminal justice system," found a more than 750% increase in the number of incarcerated women in the U.S. between 1980 and 2017, with a rise from 26,378 to 225,060 during the time period. Local jails and state prisons house the majority of incarcerated women.

The female population in the Sullivan County jail is expected to continue to grow in the coming decades.

### Local officials say drug cases are a contributing factor

Sullivan County Sheriff Jeff Cassidy said he suspects drug-related cases and probation violations may be two factors driving the increase in the number of women in jail.

Sullivan County District Attorney General Barry Staubus said he and his colleagues see more women involved in the sale and distribution of drugs, and the more addictive nature of drugs in the area, like methamphetamine, also may lead women into criminal activity.

More dealers are also relying on women to sell drugs, some women are exchanging sex for drugs, and more women who are arrested are being found with weapons, Staubus said. This analysis was based on general observations and experience rather than hard data, he said.

Anecdotally, some of the female inmates at the jail reported these kinds of issues.

And data from the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation shows the number of drug arrests in Sullivan County for both men and women increased over the past decade. Meth accounts for the largest portion of drug cases, followed by marijuana.

But as local officials point to what they see as changes in women's behavior, it's also important to question how local officials change their approaches to cases over time, said Wanda Bertram, a communications strategist for the Prison Policy Initiative — a nonprofit that looks at the harms of mass incarceration.

"People don't end up in jail by accident. They end up in jail because police choose to arrest them and prosecutors choose to charge them," Bertram said.

Asked if there have been any changes in how prosecutors approach cases that may play a role in the rise of the female inmate population, Staubus said they aren't "targeting" women and his team just sees more female defendants involved with drug cases.

It used to be a "men's world" when it came to selling and distributing drugs, Staubus said. But he said that's changed.

"We're finding the women, they're there — they are part of the arrests, they're at the scene, and they're possessing the drugs, possessing the guns in a way they didn't in the past," he said.

### Female inmates can face a number of unique challenges

An analysis from the Prison Policy Initiative notes that women can have a more difficult time than men affording cash bail due to income differences.

Nationally, 80% of women in jail are mothers, and they are often primary caretakers for children, which means time spent in jail can impact kids and families.

Limited accessible data makes it difficult to measure the extent to which these different factors may impact the local system.

In August, family responsibilities were on the mind of Sarah May Glover, 43, of Bristol, Tennessee, who has struggled with meth addiction and was serving time for violating her probation.

The last few years have been

particularly difficult for her family — her mother died, she has relatives who have struggled with mental health issues, she has a 21-year-old son, and her father has not been in the best of health.

"The whole time I've been here, he's been ill and needed me there for him. It takes a toll on him," she said.

Neece said the costs of drug and alcohol classes and probation fees add up to hundreds of dollars, which she compared to "a money racket." She added that she thinks it can often be less expensive for a defendant to just serve out their time.

Bertram, with the Prison Policy Initiative, said women may face a number of barriers when it comes to probation.

"Probation is not really designed to cater to the needs of women — probation involves a lot of mandatory appointments, check-ins, programs that you have to attend. And if, for example, you're taking care of an elder relative or you're taking care of a kid, those are going to be harder requirements to meet," Bertram said.

Additionally, because women often have lower incomes than men, it may be more difficult to pay probation fees, she said. But it's unclear to what extent this plays out locally without data on inmates' income.

Combining the costs of probation with an expectation of passing drug tests and few available resources to help inmates overcome drug addictions, Neece said the local criminal justice system sets defendants up for failure.

"Throwing drug addicts in jail is not going to help us. We're going to get out, we're going to do the same thing, and we're going to come right back," she said. "I mean, we need programs, we need stuff to help us."

### 'A public health approach'

Nazgol Ghandnoosh, a senior research analyst with The Sentencing Project, said people with substance use disorders must have access to professional treatment.

"The solution needs to be a public health approach rather than a criminal justice approach," Ghandnoosh said.

She adds, "It's 2019 — there's so much more information we have now in understanding about how addiction works and how recovery works and sending people to jail repeatedly without giving them adequate resources ... it's an irresponsible way to treat people."

Several in the criminal justice system acknowledge that a dearth of resources is a pressing issue.

"One of the things we see is because of the increasing number of women becoming involved [in drugs] ... is that we don't have adequate rehabilitative services and facilities for them to try to meet the specific needs of the women," said Staubus, the district attorney general.

For their part, some of the women inside the jail said changes are needed in how officials approach cases, particularly when it comes to drug-related issues.

"I want to have a normal life," said Neece, who added that she turned 30 in the jail this past Independence Day. She doesn't want to spend any more birthdays in jail.

She said she doesn't blame anyone else for being in jail, but she wonders if her circumstances would be different if she previously had access to a long-term rehabilitation program. Addiction needs to be approached as a health issue, Neece said.

"When you first get high, it's a choice, it's your decision — but after it becomes a daily, every day, day-to-day habit, then it's not your choice anymore," she said. "It's a problem, it's a health problem that you have, that you have developed. You need help."

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ANDRE TEAGUE/BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

Roxie Hopkins talks about her road to living drug-free. "I 100% would not be where I am today if it wasn't for that (Recovery Court) program," she said.

## Bristol couple recounts 'hopelessness' of addiction, journey to recovery

BY LURAH SPELL  
BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

If you want to know about the hopelessness of being addicted to drugs, talk to Roxie and Heath Hopkins.

The couple spent decades addicted to anything they could get their hands on, eventually leading to methamphetamine. In the process, they lost custody of their children.

At times, they were homeless. He nearly died from an overdose, but both recovered and have been living a happy life with their children for nearly four years.

Both were facing years in jail when they were offered rehabilitation instead — Roxie Hopkins through Sullivan County's Felony Recovery Court, also known as drug court.

The court allows inmates with nonviolent criminal charges who have a high need for substance use treatment to receive inpatient and/or outpatient treatment in place of serving a jail sentence.

"I was like a lot of people around here — born into an addict home," she said. "My parents were addicts, so you hear kids say, 'Well, I never wanted to grow up to be a drug addict,' and I won't say I wanted to, but ... I don't remember having goals. ... I really, legitimately always knew I was going to be a drug addict."

The 38-year-old began drinking beer at the age of 7, and by 12, she was smoking marijuana and abusing prescription pills. When she was 17, she started shooting up.

"It's just what I always knew," she said. "Unfortunately, you see it time and time again of kids not given a chance. My parents loved me. They tried, they did, but they were addicts."

When she met her husband, she was in a "whirlwind of addiction," she said, but they fell in love, got married and had three children who are now 17, 11 and 9. Her first pregnancy was the only one during which she didn't use drugs.

Roxie Hopkins said she and her husband were "functional junkies" until they started using meth for the eight years before they recovered.

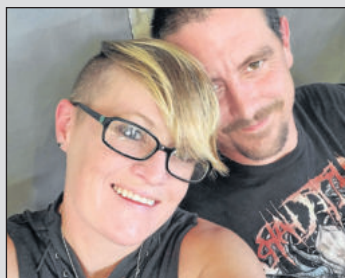
"You can't be a functional junkie on meth," she said. "You just spiral out of control."

The Hopkinses have been married for 19 years, but they weren't always together because their addictions consumed them.

"We never really split up, but it was just in that chaos of that lifestyle, we would be on separate paths and meet up at different trap houses and be like, 'Oh, hey.' And then go our separate paths again," she said.

Their children were living with family members. The eldest still lives with an aunt who has taken care of her for most of her life because they decided it was best for her. They also have custody of their niece and nephew.

In December 2015, Heath Hopkins was high when he evaded arrest, which led to a police officer using a stun gun on him, he said. He had a heart attack and was taken to the hospital. After being told he was



Before and after photos of Roxie and Heath Hopkins as they recover from drug addiction.

lucky to be alive, he was faced with the choice of jail or rehab.

"I was to the point where I just felt like myself and everybody I knew was just better off if I died, and it was a fortunate situation when I went to the rehab that I was surrounded by people that were put into my life to help me and say the right things that still make a difference today," he said.

The 40-year-old was an addict from the time he was about 13 years old.

"It was all-consuming," he said. "That was the whole force and drive behind my life was getting, finding and using drugs."

He spent more than two months in two rehabilitation facilities in Kingsport and Nashville. His wife was one of the first graduates of the Recovery Court program in October 2017.

"I didn't think any of this was possible," she said, holding back tears. "I never dreamed in a million years that I could come from where I was to even remotely close to where I am now. It is possible, and there is help out there. There's just massive amounts of people willing to help, but you've got to reach out for it, and it's not easily available, unfortunately."

Coming back together was a challenge, but over time they learned to focus on their recovery together — a complete turnaround from when they violently argued and even tried to kill one another a few times while high on meth, she said.

"It's weird that a couple can overcome what we've overcome and still make it out on the other side being 100% trusting," she said. "It's a blessing to have a partner to be able to connect with on the recovery side of things."

She added that she owes "so much" to God, Sullivan County Criminal Court Judge Jim Goodwin, who presides over Recovery Court, and the program.

"I 100% would not be where I am today if it wasn't for that program, and it's affected so many people aside from just me — my kids and their [future] kids for generations to come," she said.

She added that several others have been affected, including former addicts who recovered when they heard her story.

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## Impeachment Investigation

# Andrew Johnson back in spotlight for 1868 parallels

BY DAVID CRARY  
AP National Writer

The president traveled the country, fanning racial animus. He viewed the Congress with disdain. He also tried to undo some of the most important achievements of his predecessor, using executive power.

That was not Donald Trump, but another president who faced the ignominy of impeachment: Andrew Johnson.

As the impeachment inquiry of Trump unfolds, Johnson, never among America's most famous presidents, though widely considered one of the worst, is attracting renewed attention.

Johnson was the first president to be impeached, by the House of Representatives in 1868. He escaped removal from office by a single vote short of the required two-thirds after his trial in the Senate, but was so disgraced he was denied his party's nomination that year.

Trump and Johnson came

See **JOHNSON**, Page A5

## INSIDE



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Thank you, **John A. Britton**, for subscribing to the Bristol Herald Courier. **73/45** Weather » A10



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## SPECIAL REPORT DAY 8

# On the horizon

Officials seek answers as they address jail overcrowding problem



DAVID CRIGGER/BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

A view from inside the Sullivan County jail. County leaders are facing the decision of whether to expand and renovate or to rebuild the jail.

### Sullivan County

#### Leaders to decide between rebuilding or renovating jail

BY LURAH SPELL  
BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

**B**LOUNTVILLE, Tenn. — Consultants working on a master plan for the future of Sullivan County's jail recommended recently that the county start over and build a new jail on a new site.

It's not clear which way the county will go, but a decision is on the horizon, and, ultimately, it will be made by the County Commission.

The main jail opened in 1987 and was soon overcrowded, leading to an expansion in 1999. The "extension," a separate building, was built to house inmates and opened in 2006.

Since February, work has been underway by design firms Michael Brady Inc., or MBI, and TreanorHL to develop the master plan with the goal of determining whether to remodel and expand the current facilities or build a new jail.

The architects revealed two options — renovate and expand both facilities for \$84.7 million or build a 297,000-square-foot jail on a new 30-acre site for \$110 million. Either option

See **SULLIVAN**, Page A4



## CRITICAL MASS

Unlocking the factors behind the jail overcrowding problem in Sullivan County and Bristol, Va.



ANDRE TEAGUE/BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

Jay Henderlight of MBI speaks during a meeting as John Eisenlau of TreanorHL looks on. Both firms are spearheading a master plan for the Sullivan County jail.

### Bristol, Virginia

#### Regional jail appears to be city's only viable alternative to current

BY DAVID MCGEE  
BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

**B**RISTOL, Va. — As recently as 2018, Bristol Virginia City Council studied closing the city's nearly 50-year-old jail and sending all prisoners to the Southwest Virginia Regional Jail in Abingdon — but decided against it.

That remains an option today — yet, in a cruel twist, continuing to operate the deteriorating, seriously overcrowded city jail while also paying to house a fourth of its prisoners in other jails remains a less expensive option for a city with no fiscal capacity to construct a replacement.

Rock, meet hard place.

#### Problem dates back years

Overcrowding at the Bristol Virginia Jail is hardly a new problem, but it has come into sharp focus twice in the past six years.

In June 2013, city leaders heard a presentation by Richmond-based Moseley Architects illustrating the jail's shortcomings, including the lack of a fire suppression

See **BRISTOL**, Page A4

## MORE COVERAGE

### INSIDE

- » Regional jail authority opened nearly 15 years ago **A6**
- » Our View: Where do we go now with jail overcrowding? **A8**
- » What do readers think is the answer? Poll results **A8**
- » Columnist Ben Talley weighs in on jail overcrowding **B1**

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# CRITICAL MASS

## Sullivan

From Page A1

would increase the capacity from 619 to around 1,400. Currently, the total inmate population is more than 1,000.

A new jail would include the future option of relocating all county and city courts to the site. It could be more efficiently operated, according to MBI principal architect Jay Henderlight and TreanorHL architect John Eisenlau, and would take 2 1/2 years to design and build, compared to at least three years to renovate and expand the current facilities.

Renovation and expansion options would include an additional 560 beds at the main jail, which would bring its capacity to 939, and building onto the extension to house 480 inmates, increasing its capacity by 240. That would more than double the capacity of the jail facilities from 619 to 1,419. The expansions would be built to allow 150 beds to be added onto the main jail and 240 at the extension in the future.

A one-story expansion would be built onto the back of the main jail with a mezzanine level and a similar addition to one end of the extension, increasing the combined size of the buildings by 175,000 square feet and renovating 125,000 square feet.

The addition to the main jail would include a kitchen, medical clinic, laundry room and intake, booking and transfer areas, as well as new storage and central control areas.

Both expansions would be podular designs instead of the current linear setups, with only two to four inmates housed in each cell. They would house the architects' projected 15-year increase in inmates.

Only men are currently housed in the extension. If it's expanded, women would be housed there, and all of the men would be housed in the expanded main jail.

For months, the cost — without any designs presented — was estimated at between \$40 million and \$70 million, according to the architects. County Mayor Richard Venable told the commission in March that he predicted the cost would be between \$10 million and \$40 million and would likely involve renovation and construction to add 400 to 800 beds. But recent estimates have come in higher.

Expansion of the existing facilities would cost \$60 million and renovations \$10 million plus \$14 million in "soft costs," Henderlight said. Those costs weren't part of the other estimates and include expenses beyond construction, such as professional fees, printing and other reimbursable expenses, utilities installation, a site survey, a geotechnical study, review fees, inspections, data and information technology systems, furniture, equipment and a contingency fund for unforeseen issues.

Venable met with Sheriff's Office officials earlier this month to discuss two more options: renovating and expanding only the main jail or hiring a private company to build a new jail that would be leased back to the county. Sheriff Jeff Cassidy and Chief Jail Administrator Lee Carswell said they don't favor expanding the extension because it would mean operating two large jails.

The group discussed adding more than 200 more beds to the expansion of the main jail instead of at the extension, which would still bring the total capacity up to around 1,400, according to Lynn Stewart, a county employee who is working with the architects. The buildings could also fit beside or behind the expansion.

"We are working on a fourth option," Henderlight wrote in an email to the Herald Courier after the meeting.

Venable proposed hiring CoreCivic, based in Brentwood, Tennessee, to build a jail for the county and negotiating renovations of the current facilities. The Sheriff's Office would still be over operations, he said. Cassidy and Carswell said they were open to the idea.

CoreCivic provides solutions — including programs and building new facilities — to reduce recidivism, address aging infrastructure and house vulnerable populations, according to the company's website.

"CoreCivic has three separate lines of business: Safety, Community and Properties," wrote Amanda Gilchrist, the company's public affairs director, in an email to the Herald Courier. "While our CoreCivic Safety line of business does include management contracts to operate local jails, the proposal for Sullivan County is a real estate-only solution. CoreCivic is not proposing to operate the facility."

The master plan is slated for completion in November, and then it will be presented to the County Commission for consideration. There is no timetable for a decision.

When the Bristol Herald Courier polled the county's 24 commissioners about what they think is the solution to the overcrowded jail facilities, eight answered that the solution is to build a new, larger jail and close the current facilities. Seven said they don't know. None of those who answered said they want to renovate and expand the current jail facilities.

Two commissioners didn't respond to the question, and three said it's too early in the master plan development process to answer. One commissioner refused to respond.

Several commissioners suggested options other than those included in the poll, including judicial reform, facilitating rehabilitation programs for inmates and moving all the county's courts to Blountville to solve safety and transportation cost issues.

## POLL QUESTION

### We asked Sullivan County commissioners: What is the solution to overcrowding of Sullivan County's jail facilities?

» **0: Expansion of current facilities**

» **2: Expansion and renovation of current facilities**

[Andrew Cross (renovation only), Joe Herron]

» **8: Build a new, larger jail and close current facilities**

[Michael Cole, Joyce Crosswhite, Tony Leonard, Hershel Glover, Dwight King, Terry Harkleroad, Doug Woods, Larry Crawford]

» **7: I don't know** [Mark Hutton, Judy Blalock, Todd Broughton, Sam Jones, Alicia Starnes, Colette George, Angie Stanley]

#### Additional answers given:

» **1: All of the above** [David Akard]

» **2: Facilitate rehabilitation programs for inmates**

[Mark Hutton, Andrew Cross]

» **5: Judicial reform** [Michael Cole, Dwight King, Todd Broughton, Terry Harkleroad, Colette George]

» **7: Move all county courts to Blountville** [Joyce Crosswhite, Tony Leonard, Hershel Glover, Dwight King, Terry Harkleroad, Angie Stanley, Larry Crawford]

» **2: Use current facilities for training and/or office space**

[Michael Cole, Hershel Glover]

» **2: Curb drug and alcohol abuse in the county** [Alicia Starnes, Joe Herron]

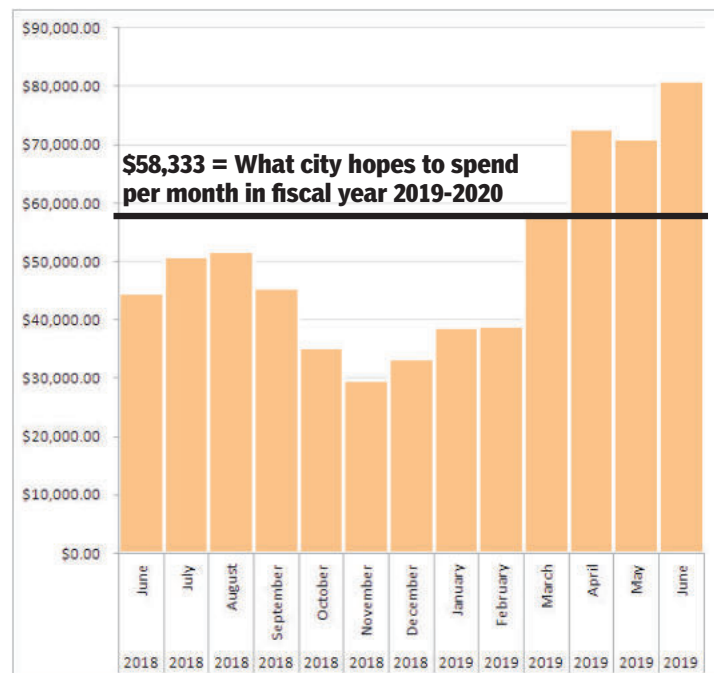
» **2: No response** [Randy Morrell, Mark Vance]

» **3: No response at this time because it's too early in the master plan development process** [Darlene Calton, Gary Stidham, Hunter Locke]

» **1: Declined to respond** [John Gardner]

**Architects with Michael Brady Inc. and TreanorHL have presented two options to address the overcrowded jail: Renovate and expand both facilities: \$84.7 million Build a 297,000-square-foot jail on a new 30-acre site: \$110 million**

### Amounts paid by Bristol, Virginia to Southwest Virginia Regional Jail Authority for housing city inmates



BHC GRAPHIC BY CHELSEA GILLENWATER

**Costs to send inmates to the regional jail jumped from less than \$47,500 a month on average to \$75,000 in April, May and June 2019.**

### Local Jail Facilities in the Region

#### Tennessee

- » Carter County Detention Center, Elizabethton
- » Greene County Detention Center, Greeneville
- » Hawkins County Jail, Rogersville
- » Johnson City Jail, Johnson City
- » Johnson County Jail, Mountain City
- » Kingsport City Jail, Kingsport
- » Sullivan County Detention Center, Blountville
- » Unicoi County Jail, Erwin
- » Washington County Detention Center, Jonesborough

#### Virginia

- » Bristol Virginia Jail
- » Southwest Virginia Regional Jail, Abingdon
- » Southwest Virginia Regional Jail, Duffield
- » Southwest Virginia Regional Jail, Haysi
- » Southwest Virginia Regional Jail, Tazewell

#### Juvenile jail facilities

- » Highlands Juvenile Detention Center, Bristol, Virginia
- » Upper East Tennessee Regional Juvenile Detention Center, Johnson City

#### Tennessee Department of Corrections facilities

- » Northeast Correctional Complex, Mountain City
- » Northeast Correctional Complex Carter County annex, Roan Mountain

#### Virginia Department of Corrections facilities

- » Appalachian Men's Detention & Diversion Center, Honaker
- » Bland Correctional Center, Bland
- » Keen Mountain Correctional Center, Oakwood
- » Marion Correctional Treatment Center, Marion
- » Pocahontas State Correctional Center, Pocahontas
- » Red Onion State Prison, Pound
- » Wallens Ridge State Prison, Big Stone Gap

#### Federal Bureau of Prisons

- » USP Lee, Pennington Gap, Virginia

## Bristol

From Page A1

system; scant space for inmate programming; no interior recreation space; and noncompliance with a number of state standards enacted since it was built — although it's "grandfathered in" because it was built prior to their passage.

For example, the state Department of Corrections prescribes 400 square feet of space per inmate when designing a new corrections facility, and the current jail has about a fourth of that amount.

Based on the inmate population in 2013 — about 160 in Bristol and 30 at other facilities, plus expected growth — consultants then recommended an 80,000-square-foot facility. However, that City Council was immersed in changing city managers and trying to get The Falls commercial center off the ground, so it ultimately took no action.

A subsequent study predicted it would cost \$40 million to construct a city jail, a figure that didn't include land acquisition or site preparation costs.

Just over a year later — in October 2014 — panicked city officials met with the Southwest Virginia Regional Jail Authority to negotiate transferring its prisoners and securing employment for impacted city corrections officers in a move that appeared destined to close the city jail.

The authority was expanding three of its facilities at that time and agreed to hire all the city's certified officers impacted by a closing.

However, the following month, City Council took no action on a proposal to join the jail authority — effectively killing the plan. Former Mayor Archie Hubbard said at that meeting there was "no way" the city could afford a plan that would cost an additional \$1.2 million annually on top of what it was already spending to operate the jail, even though that figure was about half of original estimates of an extra \$2.4 million per year.

Former Sheriff Jack Weisenburger praised the decision at that time, noting that it preserved local jobs, didn't force families to travel outside the city to visit those incarcerated and was more convenient for attorneys and the city court system. If it closes the jail, the city wouldn't save the salaries of corrections officers, since those are paid by the Virginia State Compensation Board, but it could save the costs of employee benefits.

Four years later and facing continued increases in the inmate population, the current City Council revisited the regional jail alternative and again determined it would be more cost-effective to stay the course.

City Council was again briefed on the overcrowding issue as costs continued rising.

### Still bursting at the seams

The average monthly census inside the city facility hasn't dipped below 150 since last June — averaging 151.9 for all of 2018 and 155.7 through the first six months of 2019.

In 2018, the city created a judicial alternative work program to supplement the drug court program but collectively they have about half the participants needed to truly impact the overcrowding, City Manager Randy Eads said.

"All options are on the table as to the judicial alternative sentencing program, the drug court program and the local jail," Eads said. "I think the regional jail can come into the discussion. It just depends on what our numbers look like."

The work program is designed to get nonviolent offenders working so they can complete their sentences while participating in a monitoring program.

"If the judicial alternative sentencing program works as intended, I think we can continue with the city jail for the foreseeable future. However, if the judicial alternative program does not work, and we don't get the numbers in there, there will be a hard discussion next budget season as to whether or not this judicial alternative sentencing program is going to continue," Eads said. "It may not make sense for taxpayer dollars to spend \$400,000 of local money on a program that is not really being effective."

Failure of that program — combined with no reduction in inmate numbers — would almost certainly spark revisiting the regional jail option.

"I can tell you the regional jail is always a possibility," Eads said, adding that the current City Council may ultimately be forced to make the call.

The regional jail system currently charges \$39 per inmate per day. Using the 160 inmate figure plus another 60 already housed there, the total would be \$3.13 million annually, but that doesn't include administrative costs for jail authority membership. Currently, the city has budgeted \$2.55 million for current jail operations plus \$700,000 for external housing and another \$400,000 to fund the alternative sentencing program, meaning those numbers have grown perilously close.

"There was a break-even number where we might as well stay with our current jail. That number was 225 inmates in January 2018," Eads said. "That was the number where you had to start considering the regional jail as opposed to the city jail. Currently, there are about 160 inmates in our jail and roughly 60 inmates at the regional jail."

In its 2018 analysis, the city jail's budget was \$2.55 million for fiscal 2018-19 with a "magic number" expense of less than \$600,000 to house inmates elsewhere — an average of 40 per day. The city maintained that average for most of the previous fiscal year, but sharp increases this spring changed everything.

# CRITICAL MASS

## Jail

From Page A4

Through the first nine months of the past fiscal year, the city spent just over \$427,000 — or less than \$47,500 per month to house prisoners elsewhere. However, the average cost of housing inmates elsewhere shot up to nearly \$75,000 per month for April, May and June of 2019.

The city's total bill for prisoners held outside its jail for fiscal 2018-19 was \$607,302, slightly above the \$600,000 goal.

In the current budget, council set aside \$700,000 for inmate housing for all of fiscal 2019-20, or an average of \$58,333 for the 12 months. However, the \$81,000 needed to pay its June bill came out of that total, leaving \$619,000 for the remaining 11 months. Based on that \$75,000 per month fourth-quarter average, all those funds would be expended by April 2020.

### Annex rehab rejected

One potential part of the solution now off the table was converting the former police department offices adjacent to the jail into prisoner space. A preliminary review suggested that area could house between 20 and 24 inmates and would likely have been used for nonviolent offenders, Eads said.

However, the city would have to bring that space up to current Department of Corrections standards.

"We put out an RFP [request for proposals], met with architects and engineers. It was going to cost \$65,000 just to get the architectural drawings done," Eads said. "The sheriff said we shouldn't waste the money."

Sheriff David Maples didn't view it as a wise expense.

"If we were able to use it, it has to come to today's standards. The building is 5,000 square feet, but not all of it is usable. My theory was to put trustees over there," Maples said. "The cost was the overriding factor — was the cost going to create enough savings for the city?"

After reviewing the preliminary proposals but not cost estimates, Maples said it appears the small space wouldn't be worthy of a major investment.

### Difficult for morale

Any discussion of closing the jail takes its toll on the morale of corrections officers who might lose jobs.

"That affects our staff, when that first started rumbling [that] they were going to move the jail," Maples said. "Once our staff heard the jail might be closing, people start looking for jobs. A couple came in and said they would ride it out. People are feeding their families, and you start thinking about losing their job. People stopped applying for jobs here. The struggles of the city affect everybody here. I'm choosing to take a positive attitude. The staff has been very committed, and we're going to try to do our best to try to help the city out."

### Council viewpoints

So how do the five elected members of the City Council view this dilemma?

One of the planks in Mayor Neal Osborne's election platform was keeping the city jail open, but he acknowledges it will be a challenge.

"We're kind of stuck between a rock and a hard place," Osborne said. "I ran on keeping the jail in the city because you don't want the deputies to lose their jobs, and it's expensive to send [inmates] to the regional jail, and we have no control over what they charge. We're at their mercy for whatever rates might be set."

Osborne acknowledged the city's alternative sentencing programs haven't yet made enough of an impact on the jail population.

"You can't just set it on the back burner forever, just like all the problems," Osborne said. "I think you have to sit down with all the stakeholders and say, 'How do we reduce the num-

bers?' If we reduce the numbers, that solves a lot of problems.

... If you reduce the numbers, you make the situation less bad before you make it good."

The mayor doesn't see how the city could afford to either build or renovate its jail.

Vice Mayor Bill Hartley said trying to allocate funds for jail operations each year is one of the biggest challenges the council faces while developing its budget.

"There really are no easy, simple solutions. I think if there were, somebody would have already done them by now," Hartley said, adding he appreciates the efforts of the sheriff, city manager and others to contain costs and reduce the inmate population.

Hartley said one of the issues is figuring out the financial point it no longer makes sense to operate the city jail.

"Right now, moving to the regional jail in the short run would be a little more expensive than what we're paying, but, maybe in the long run, it would save money compared to renovating a facility or building a new facility — both of which we really don't have the capacity to do, with our debt limits. ... We need to look at the numbers and see what makes sense both short term and long term."

Councilman Kevin Wingard supports keeping the city jail.

"I would like to keep the jail inside the city and for us to control our own destiny. This regional [jail] would work out, but you're at the mercy of another board to determine your price," Wingard said. "I'm not an advocate of going regional. ... If we retain our jail locally, we retain those sheriff's jobs — decent jobs with benefits — and jobs is something we're seriously hurting for in this city. Going regional just compounds that."

Wingard said the city has many needs and little money but sees a turnaround coming.

"If we can have a few more years like we've had the past two years, we will be able to start navigating our way through these issues," Wingard said. "Is it doable? I think it is with the trends we're seeing with our finances. ... Shortterm, we'll have to keep sending [some] to the regional jail."

Councilman Kevin Mumpower said the regional jail remains an option, but it's currently the most expensive.

"We're looking at every option to see what is the most cost-effective," Mumpower said. "We should salvage the jail if it's possible. So what can we do to relieve the pressure on the jail? That's where the work release discussion came in."

Mumpower said a new jail isn't totally out of the question.

"We're actually looking at some future property," Mumpower said. "If we had to do another jail, where would it be? Another jail is a lot of money, but we haven't gotten to that discussion. If we had to do that, what would we do?"

Councilman Anthony Farnum said his recent tour of the jail facilities was eye-opening.

"I saw for myself it was overcrowded, and the sheriff pointed out a few things about the plumbing and the heat, and these are the things we're dealing with. It's definitely an old building that would need a lot of work," Farnum said.

He added that the council is trying to address multiple issues simultaneously, from a proposed new school to making the landfill financially viable, but he acknowledges the jail is on that list.

"It's [jail] right up there. I don't think I could prioritize one over the other. ... We're trying to address everything," Farnum said. "I know it's an issue we need to figure out, and, whatever the ultimate answer is, it's not going to be an easy answer. It will take a lot of work, but it's on our radar that it's a project we need to figure out how to fix."

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PHOTO COURTESY OF THE SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA REGIONAL JAIL

A pod area is shown at the Southwest Virginia Regional Jail Authority in Abingdon, which opened nearly 15 years ago.

# Regional jail authority opened nearly 15 years ago

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BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

The Southwest Virginia Regional Jail Authority, which houses more prisoners than any other jail authority in the state, has been operating for nearly 15 years.

With four facilities, the authority serves the Virginia counties of Buchanan, Dickenson, Lee, Russell, Scott, Smyth, Tazewell, Washington and Wise, as well as the city of Norton.

Each of the jurisdictions, except Tazewell County, originally signed up in 2003 to create the authority to replace aging and overcrowding facilities across Southwest Virginia. Tazewell County joined the authority in 2005.

Due to an overcrowded city jail in Bristol, twice in recent years, past City Councils have reviewed then rejected closing the city jail, reducing staffing and sending all its prisoners to the regional jail network.

To relieve overcrowding, some Bristol prisoners have been housed at the regional jail in Abingdon in recent years at a cost of \$39 per inmate per day. It cost the city \$607,302 from July 1, 2018, to June 30, 2019, to house inmates at the facility.

City Manager Randy Eads said the regional jail may again come into the discussion about what to do with the overcrowded city jail.

When asked whether the regional jail could adequately house Bristol's inmates, authority Superintendent Stephen Clear said: "The decision to house Bristol inmates is a decision between the City Council and the authority board."

Before the jail authority was created, county jails across Southwest Virginia were aging, deteriorating and overcrowding.

Buchanan County's jail was the oldest facility operating in the region. The jail, on Walnut Street in Grundy, was built in 1921 and designed to house 34 prisoners.

Sheriff Ray Foster said his jail housed 80 to 100 inmates before the regional jail opened in April 2005 in Haysi, a Dickenson County community more than 30 minutes from Grundy.

"It's overcrowded in my jail," Foster told the Bristol Herald Courier in 2005. "I have people sleeping on mattresses on the floor. This regional jail is something we really need."

Once closed, the old jail in Grundy was torn down, according to Sharon Thornsbury with the Buchanan County Sheriff's Office.

The old site was then used to add an expansion onto the county courthouse.

The regional jail in Haysi, which opened to house 145 inmates from Buchanan and Dickenson counties, was the second of three original regional jail facilities to open in Southwest Virginia. The first opened in early 2005 in Abingdon, and the third opened in Duffield shortly after Haysi's opening.

Abingdon's regional jail facility, off Hillman Highway, houses prisoners from Russell, Smyth and Washington counties.

The old Washington County jail was on Park Street in Abingdon until April 2005. The regional jail moved the inmates at that time, according to Sheriff Fred Newman.

"It was overcrowded and outdated," Newman said. "The building was in need of repair: plumbing, security issues, et cetera."

Newman said 21 of his correctional officers went to work at the regional jail when it opened.

In 2013, the Holston Mountain Artisans, which leased the building for four years, purchased the old jail from the county.

Washington County's old jail was designated to house 54 inmates, but it was often well over 100% capacity.

The jails in Dickenson, Lee and Scott counties were each designated to house 34 inmates and were built in the early 1950s. Russell County's jail was to house 36 inmates and was built in 1963, according to information from the Virginia Compensation Board.

The Smyth County jail was built in 1970 and

housed 40 inmates. Wise County's lockup housed 43 inmates and was built in 1974.

Just before the regional jail system opened, a 2004 Virginia Compensation Board report showed that each of the counties in the region had overcrowded facilities.

Tazewell County, which didn't join the authority until after the first three jails were built, had a jail originally built in 1952 to house 40 inmates. At times, the Tazewell County jail was at more than 200% capacity, according to the Compensation Board report.

Current Sheriff Brian Hiaett said Tazewell County built a facility because the previous one was "very old and outdated." There were no computer systems, no central air, and it was packed, he said.

Southwest Virginia municipalities began considering a regional jail authority in 2000, the Herald Courier reported. They decided that taking a regional approach rather than building local jails would save millions of taxpayer dollars.

In Tazewell County, where a new jail was just built in 2000, the Board of Supervisors decided to join the regional network, which could help with costs and allow for inmates to be kept in the other jail facilities, Hiaett said.

"I do feel that having the regional jail does allow a sheriff's office to concentrate on other aspects of law enforcement, such as investigating crimes, serving papers and patrolling our county because, even though the jail is regional, we continue to have a close relationship, and they are able to provide us with any help we need at their facilities," Hiaett said. "The officers there assist us with investigations and allow us to use inmates for multiple projects throughout our communities."

As of July 29, each of the regional jail facilities was below capacity, according to information provided by Superintendent Clear. With a total of 2,525 beds, only 2,121 people were incarcerated in the jails.

The Abingdon jail, with 1,082 beds, had a population of 903 on July 29. Duffield, the second largest facility, has 744 beds. There were 662 people incarcerated on July 29.

The Haysi jail has 496 beds but only 360 inmates on July 29. The regional jail in Tazewell, which is the smallest facility, has 203 beds. Its population was 196 on July 29.

"In my opinion, overall, we have not reached overcrowding, taking into account the infrastructure and number of beds of the facilities," Clear said. "However, on any given day, female/maximum security could be full at one of the facilities, and we do not accept inmates from outside our jurisdictions that meet that criteria."

Clear noted that, in addition to the member counties and the city of Norton, the authority houses federal inmates from both Tennessee and Virginia, along with some inmates from the city of Bristol, Virginia, which is currently overcrowded.

The superintendent noted that if the federal and Bristol inmates were removed from the authority, the total population would be fewer than 2,000.

As of July 29, the authority housed 61 inmates from Bristol, 73 from the federal marshals in Virginia and 105 inmates from the federal marshals in Tennessee.

In recent years, it has cost around \$60 to house each inmate at the authority's facilities. The statewide average is \$85, according to the Compensation Board.

Clear noted that the state provides some of the funding for inmates.

The latest available report shows the authority with \$47.13 million in total expenses for fiscal year 2017.

In Tennessee, state law provides for the creation of a regional jail authority. However, none exist. Cities and counties, including Sullivan County, operate their own jails. Many of the state's municipal jails are overcrowded.

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