



## Hamilton County Sheriff's Office

Jim Neil, Sheriff

# MEDIA RELEASE

## STATE OF THE JAIL



**Hamilton County, Ohio, February 14, 2018** – Hamilton County Sheriff Jim Neil shares the “State of the Jail” in the midst of a devastating opioid epidemic.

The Hamilton County Justice Center was opened in 1985. The Justice Center replaced the Cincinnati Workhouse and the Jail above the Courthouse which, together, could house about 2000 inmates. The facility was outdated and provided inadequate jail space almost immediately upon completion because it only had housing for 840 inmates. Based upon a Consent Decree from the Federal District Court, the Justice Center was permitted to increase the inmate number to 1240 inmates using double cells and a classification system for inmates. Shortly after the Consent Decree was agreed upon, the Queensgate Correctional Facility was built. These two changes returned the available jail population for facilities operated by the Hamilton County Sheriff to level available prior to 1985.

In December of 2008, the Queensgate Correctional Facility housing up to 822 inmates closed abruptly due to budget cuts. As part of a Federal Consent Decree issued in the late 1980's various early release programs were adopted in Hamilton County to alleviate overcrowding conditions in the jail. Following the closing of the Queensgate Correctional Facility in 2008-2009, the prior Sheriff's Administration adopted additional early release programs to account for the resultant lack of that jail space. In 2017 these release programs resulted in more than 8,000 inmates being released before and after resolution of their criminal cases. As a further effort to offset the loss of the Queensgate facility much of the County's rainy day reserve fund was spent housing hundreds of inmates in Butler County.

As demonstrated above Jail space has been a problem for years. In 2016 and 2017 it worsened due to the opioid epidemic our county is currently facing. The spike of addicted inmates requiring medical and/or mental attention, as well as a higher number of more violent offenders has been a tremendous drain on our County's limited jail resources. In June of 2017, despite implementation of the early release programs, the Justice Center inmate population count rose to an all-time high of 1,611. Sheriff Neil

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determined that the increasing number of inmates posed potential risks to the inmates, staff, visitors and corrections officers. Consequently, Sheriff Neil declared a State of Emergency and immediately took the steps available to him under Ohio law to alleviate the overcrowding and manage the inmate count.

Sheriff Neil implemented the following changes:

Sent 25 inmates to be housed in the jail in Butler County, Ohio.

Floor level cots (referred to as “boats”) were purchased and used to sleep inmates in open pods or recreation areas.

119 beds were removed from the closed Queensgate facility and installed in the Justice Center creating more double cells.

Preparations were made to install more toilets.

The number of telephones for inmate use was increased.

Staffing when the Boats were in use was increased.

The Justice center was meant to be a short term housing facility, but it’s turned into a prison housing criminals with an average stay of 132 days. This fall, after the above changes were made, the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections conducted its annual Jail Inspection of the Justice Center. Sheriff Neil was recently notified by the State of Ohio that the Justice Center passed the State’s Jail Inspection.

It is the Sheriff’s Office responsibility to provide for the care, custody and control of the inmates, and a safe, sanitary environment with food and proper medical care. The Sheriff does not have authority to build more Jail space. Based upon historical data, in the spring and summer months our inmate population rises along with the temperature. Add to that there are state level budgetary efforts which are projected to result in inmates who will be mandated to serve their sentences locally rather than in state penitentiaries. Compounding all of these factors is the criminal activity associated with the opioid epidemic. The outlook indicates that the projected inmate population in the coming months could be difficult to manage.

Warren County (OH), Franklin County (OH), Kenton County (Ky) and several others are currently working to build or secure additional space to house both addicted criminal offenders and/or those who are addicted but not involved in the criminal justice system. Many experts in the field of Corrections believe it is imperative to not only incarcerate inmates who have engaged in criminal activity, but also to provide treatment options for

those inmates dealing with substance abuse, addictions and co-existing mental health issues in an effort to reduce recidivism. The goal is to break the vicious cycle of addiction, often exacerbated with medical and/or mental health issues, in order to decrease recidivism rates. The reality too often is that repeat offenders are continually recycled in and out of our jail at great cost to our citizenry.

The Sheriff is currently actively working with political leaders in Hamilton County as well as Community stakeholders in the fields of treatment and prevention to address what are systemic problems facing our community. Sheriff Neil shared, "Other neighboring counties and regions are also taking a proactive approach to treatment, which makes their communities safer places for people to live and raise their children. I am actively participating with our Community leaders to address the critical issue of balancing holding criminals accountable for their criminal behavior while also addressing systemic social and individual problems that cause people to commit crimes. A dual approach of incarceration and treatment necessitates an effective use of community resources to address addiction and behaviors which lead to the commission of crimes. Sufficient space to incarcerate and treat persons committing crimes to feed an addiction is the measured response we need to begin to tackle our opioid and jail over-crowding issues here in Hamilton County."

Our jail overcrowding is a symptom of larger Community social problems and together as a Community we can solve them.