

A NEW JAIL? IN MONROE COUNTY



THE PROBLEM, SOME SOLUTIONS, AND THE CANDIDATE POSITIONS

The Situation: New Jail Proposal

In 2007, the Monroe County Council approved a plan for a new jail and juvenile detention facility to be built on South Rogers. In April, the County Commissioners contracted PMSI, a private firm, to design it. PMSI will supervise the construction of the "corrections campus" if it is approved and funded. The Board of Judges, all three County Commissioners, and 5 of 7 County Council members have endorsed the plan; however, several county candidates currently running for office have challenged it.

The Supposed Problem: Overcrowding

Much of the support for a new jail comes out of a concern for the overcrowded and poor conditions at the current jail. A lawsuit is pending over the issue. Yes, jail overcrowding is a serious human rights problem, but expanding jail capacity to lock more people up is NOT a human rights solution.

The Real Problem: This country relies too much on incarceration

A recent study showed that 1 in 100 adult Americans are incarcerated (2.3 million currently behind bars), and that the US imprisons far more than any other nation, with 25% of all the inmates in the entire world. We rely on incarceration, policing, and punishment as responses to deeper social, economic, and political problems but that has only made our communities poorer, more divided and unsafe. We should look to more efficient and humane ways to make our community safe.

The Solution: Smart, Productive, Cost-Saving & Jail-Cutting

Immediate Measures - Over half of the current Monroe jail population consists of people held unnecessarily because of technical violations, inefficient police procedures, probation infractions, and simple court backlogging. By appropriately addressing these bureaucratic incarcerations we can provide a number of effective short-term solutions that would immediately reduce overcrowding:

- Let the police use citations rather than arrest for certain offenses.
- Don't violate people on probation or parole for trivial offenses.
- Change the current procedures for police interaction with the public, especially the mandatory (yup, mandatory!) handcuffing policy, which leads to innumerable arrests for "resisting arrest."
- Change the way people on parole and probation are given notice to appear for a court date or hearing. Currently, notices are left on windswept porches, high foot-traffic areas, previous addresses, and so on, and then people are violated for "failure to appear." Use an 800# telephone call-in system (where the parolee has to call in weekly) instead.
- Hire two more Public Defenders and a half-dozen paralegals to process people