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Sheriff: Overcrowding in local jail worsens

'It's a continuing, vicious circle, and there doesn't seem to be an end to it.'

By Holly Becka

REPORTER

There are 226 inmates currently packed into the Brazos County Jail, a facility that holds a maximum of 166. Sixty-five inmates are spending nights sleeping on the floor.

And, as Brazos County Sheriff Ron Miller told the Aggie GOP Tuesday evening, that's only the beginning of the problem with overcrowding in the local jail.

"The jail holds 166 people, but realistically we can get only around 135 people in there before people have to start sleeping on the floor," Miller said.

He said the jail works on a module

system of containing inmates, with the largest module accommodating 12 people. Inmates are put into 13 different classifications, according to the severity and number of their offenses, and then put into the modules.

"Although you have 166 beds, you can't put a DWI offender going in for 30 days with a guy in on a burglary charge, and vice versa," Miller said. "Fifty-seven of these (current) inmates belong to the Texas Department of Corrections, but they weren't able to take them. Our quota per month is 19; that's all we can take."

Miller said that each month the department of corrections gets over-

crowded, causing the Brazos County Jail to get behind in sending inmates. Therefore, the local jail becomes more overcrowded. Overcrowding produces discipline and health problems.

"It's a continuing, vicious circle," Miller said, "and there doesn't seem to be an end to it."

The sheriff said that he would like to see more jails built in an attempt to solve the problem. Brazos County currently is in the process of developing a minimum-security facility that will be located about one mile away from the jail, which is located on the fourth floor of the courthouse.

"I would like to see more prisons built, but this depends on the taxpayer," he said. "I think the public is concerned with overcrowding, but I don't think they're fully aware of the problem. The only thing we can do is build more prisons."

Miller said Bryan-College Station taxpayers spent about \$1.4 million last year on prisoners in the local jail.

Miller said another solution to the problem could be the early release of inmates who are jailed for misdemeanors.

"But deciding on who gets released could be a big problem," he said. "If we let a person in for a DWI out early and he drinks and drives and kills your mother, you're going

to be very mad, and I'm still going to have to look at myself in the mirror in the morning. It's a no-win situation."

"Other solutions might be halfway houses, private jails, counseling and job placement," Miller said. "These are possible ways to solve the problem, but not very good ones."

"We're trying to look at innovative ways to solve the problem that will generate money into the community."

Miller said Bryan-College Station is among the top 30 percent of areas in Texas in terms of overcrowding.

"We're in a bad situation in Texas, and I don't see it getting better in the near future," he said.

Genetic test may be admitted in murder trial

CLEBURNE (AP) — Results of genetic tests may be admitted in the trial of a former pizza cook accused of killing two teen-agers and a 12-year-old girl, a judge ruled Tuesday.

State District Judge John MacLean said DNA tests are reliable and agreed to allow prosecutors to admit them as evidence in the trial of Ronald Trimboli, who is accused in the 1985 slayings of three Arlington youths.

Prosecutors claim the DNA tests link Trimboli, 44, to the rape of one of the three youths he is accused of killing.

Trimboli is charged with the June 17, 1985, killings of Danielle Lemieux, 14; her sister, Renee, 12; and a house guest, John Bradley, 17.

Prosecutors have said the DNA testimony would be the major difference between Trimboli's current murder trial and two previous ones that resulted in mistrials.

Judge MacLean heard testimony Monday from experts on DNA testing who were called by the prosecution and from some called by the defense who questioned the reliability of the tests.

DNA, or deoxyribonucleic acid, is genetic material unique to each individual. It has been used for less than three years in criminal trials, so judges routinely preview the evidence to determine whether jurors should hear it.

The witnesses Monday said that the DNA fingerprint test used to compare Trimboli's semen to semen found inside Danielle Lemieux is widely accepted by scientists for a variety of purposes, mainly in biomedical research.

Also, the experts endorsed as reliable a "cloning" procedure developed by a California laboratory. The technique allows scientists to take a small amount of DNA and duplicate it to obtain large enough amounts for further testing.

The "cloning" procedure, used by the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta, was used by California scientist Edward Blake to duplicate Trimboli's DNA sample.

A&M NOW president joins national protest

By Melissa Naumann

REPORTER

When one Texas A&M student speaks out Sunday, she will be part of a national voice asking that abortion stay legal.

Bonnie Harris, president of the A&M chapter of the National Organization for Women, will go to Washington Sunday to participate in the March for Women's Equality/Women's Lives.

The march is scheduled 15 days before Webster vs. Reproductive Health Services goes before the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court is expected to use this case to reconsider the 1973 Roe vs. Wade decision legalizing abortion.

Although the march probably will not have a direct impact, it will send a signal to Congress and the Supreme Court that many people want to keep abortion safe and legal, Harris, a senior political science major, said.

"I think the march will have a more symbolic effect than anything else," she said. "There probably won't be any tangible results, but the symbolic part is what's important now."

Harris believes the Webster vs. Reproductive Services decision will be overturned and lead to a reversal in the legality of abortion.

"Personally, I feel that Roe vs. Wade will be overturned," she said. "I do feel that abortion should be safe and legal because no birth control is 100 percent effective. A woman should have a choice whether she chooses a safe, legal abortion or an illegal abortion. Overturning Roe vs. Wade will take away her choice."

The issue of abortion is frequently clouded by inappropriate labels, she added.

"As far as I'm concerned, the anti- or pro-abortion labels are incorrect," Harris said. "No one would ever say that they would choose an abortion over the pill (as a form of birth control), so just saying someone is pro-abortion is ridiculous."

Other organizations will attend the march including Mormons for Choice, Catholics for Choice, the National Abortion Rights Action League and the American Civil Liberties Union.

"I wouldn't be surprised if it's of the same magnitude as the civil rights march," she said.

State officials back committee to examine utility commission

AUSTIN (AP) — As confirmation hearings began on Public Utility Commission nominees, state leaders said Tuesday they would appoint a special committee to examine the agency, which sets telephone and electric rates.

The study, which will include a look at whether the PUC should be restructured, could lead to a special session, said Lt. Gov. Bill Hobby, House Speaker Gib Lewis and a spokesman for Gov. Bill Clements.

"The governor's very concerned about the operations of the commission, and I certainly share those concerns," Hobby said.

The PUC has drawn fire for such actions as a rate reduction it ordered for GTE Southwest Inc.

The telephone company has said the \$59 million rate decrease and \$128 million refund of overcharges to customers would force layoffs and reduction in state investment. Meanwhile, some consumer representatives have said the cut was not large enough.

The three-member PUC — including Chairman Marta Greytok of Taylor Lake Village and member William Cassin of Houston, who are up for confirmation — is to consider motions for re-hearing in the case Thursday.

The GTE case "brought the situation to a head," Lewis said.

But Lewis added, "I don't think we should condemn any person who is presently serving on that commission or who has served on that commission. What we hope to do is go in and re-examine the PUC in its entirety and make whatever changes need to be made."

Reggie Bashur, Clements' press secretary, said that

when the interim committee finishes its work, a process that could take months. "The governor has indicated he would seriously consider calling a special session."

Greytok and Cassin, both appointed by Clements, faced hard questions during the confirmation hearing by the Senate Nominations Committee about rate decisions, PUC management practices and their definition of the public interest.

Sen. Chet Edwards, a Duncanville Democrat who heads the Nominations Committee, closely questioned Greytok about items such as her statement during a PUC hearing that, "I am firmly convinced that what is best for the utilities in this state is best for the consumer."

Greytok said the statement was a distortion of her broader philosophy. She and Cassin said they try to balance the interests of different consumers and utilities.

"I am very pro-business," she said. "I am also very pro-consumer, and you will not long have one without the other."

In a change of position, Cassin also said he no longer supports amending the state law requiring open meetings.

"I have come around to the view expressed to me very eloquently by Chairman Edwards some time ago, that the advantages of the Open Meetings Act far outweigh the disadvantages of that legislation," he said.

Although he described complying fully with that law as "fairly inefficient and inconvenient," Cassin said the importance of public confidence that PUC dealings are open was brought home to him by the controversy surrounding the GTE case.

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