

County report urges new wing on workhouse

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NEW BRUNSWICK — Both the Middlesex County Workhouse and the county jail are "grossly inadequate" facilities, and they "fall far short" of accepted standards for prisons, according to a report released yesterday by the county.

In a 133-page study of the county's corrections and penal institutions, the Philadelphia-based American Foundation, Inc., Institute of Corrections recommended that the county construct a new wing on the North Brunswick workhouse and make changes to existing facilities worth \$2.69 million to allow more specialized types of incarceration in the facilities that already exist.

The report, written by William G. Nagel, director of the foundation, also suggested the county establish a "Department of Justice Resources" to oversee all penal institutions instead of fragmenting their control over several departments, as is now the case.

The philosophy generally followed through the report—which investigated the county's juvenile detention practices, probation and prosecutor's involvement, and statistical trends in population and crime rates—opted for better outside work and agency programs instead of more frequent and longer jail terms.

Nagel and his staff were authorized by the freeholder board last year to

study the county's penal system for \$10,000. The study, though not stated to be a response to prisoners' demands for better conditions, came after a month-long strike by inmates at the workhouse last July. Many of the problems cited by prisoners then were included in the report.

The workhouse, for example, was listed as "grossly inadequate" in its living space for prisoners, work programs, inside recreation facilities, classification, medical facilities and library. The jail was listed as "grossly inadequate" in all those areas plus its outside recreation and visiting program.

"In our opinion both the Middlesex County Jail and the workhouse fall far short of meeting the constitutional tests articulated in the standards manuals and growing list of court decisions..." the report said. "It may only be a matter of time before this county will be faced with a test of the constitutionality of its correctional system."

The report recommends:

- Alternate methods of punishment beyond those currently in use, such as probation or pretrial release to "qualified persons or organizations" or releases with certain restrictions on movements or activities;
- The renovation of the county jail to lower the number of inmates there into two categories: 20 rooms for untried prisoners and 20 rooms for "trial ready cases";
- 90 rooms to replace the dormitory

arrangement in the workhouse which would be used for untried inmates;

- 32 rooms for women in a "modified" juvenile detention center while using the rest of the center for juveniles, or moving them from the current site near the workhouse to the old detention center at

the Route 130 traffic circle in North Brunswick;

spaces for work-release prisoners in nonsecure facilities, perhaps in trailers on the workhouse site;

- 60 rooms to be built in the new wing adjacent to the workhouse for misdemeanants;

- Overflow facilities for up to 30 persons in a trailer stockade adjacent to the new minimum-security facility for the 90 prisoners.

The cost for reconstruction would total \$2.69 million, mostly to pay for the 60-bed facility, auxiliary activity area and 40 additional cells, all at the workhouse.

If the county were to build a wholly new facility, especially a central one to house all prisoners, the cost might go as high as \$15.6 million for 400 prisoners, the study said.

Freeholder Frank Pelly, who is a member of the county's criminal justice planning committee, called for a meeting of the body April 1 when Nagel will be present to discuss the report and answer questions. Until then, Pelly said, the freeholders probably will not discuss the study.