

Sheriff's Office Consolidates Work Release Programs

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As part of an on-going review of the Sheriff's Office budget, Sheriff Gerald Couch is announcing a major cost savings measure aimed at reducing the department's financial footprint.

The effort focuses on streamlining the male and female work release programs. To that end, the department will move forward with consolidation of both programs back into the jail's main facility on Barber Road. Built in 1999, male work release is presently housed as a stand-alone building just up the street from the jail on Barber Road. Female work release has been located on Vine Street in Gainesville since 2002, in an aging building that housed the Gainesville Regional Youth Detention Center for many years prior to the county taking it over. Maintaining both facilities, with all of their related maintenance and upkeep, has been a significant financial burden on the department.

By combining both of those programs under the auspices of the main jail, the department will be able to realize an annual cost savings of approximately \$1 million. This will be derived mainly from a reduced manpower requirement, as well as the aforementioned maintenance expenses, uniforms, equipment, and supplies, all while continuing to generate over \$300,000 in revenue. An additional benefit to the consolidation will be the potential to increase the number of inmates assigned to the programs by about 75, which will not only reduce expenses associated with housing inmates in the regular facility, but will enable the department to employ some of that manpower in the form of work details.

While the programs will no longer operate out of those buildings, the male work release building will be converted to a storage facility, requiring only a fraction of the expenses currently needed to make it an inhabitable structure for inmates. The female work release building will be turned over to the Hall County Government for their use or sale.

In terms of staffing, this move will allow some positions to be reallocated for use in other areas of the Sheriff's Office, such as:

- Creation of the Community Service Officer (CSO), whose duties include manning a newly created front desk position in the lobby of the Law Enforcement Center. Among other things, the CSO's duties will include taking incident reports, which will reduce the need for patrol officers to leave their patrol functions to come to the office to complete paperwork.
- Creating an additional School Resource Officer to better protect and serve our community and school system.
- Creation of an additional Training Officer position. This will enable the training staff, which hasn't been increased in over 20 years, to better train and prepare our officers to serve the community.
- Creating an additional Courthouse Deputy position to provide better security and service. Court Services has not added a Deputy position in over 11 years, despite the addition of more judges and courts.

“With the re-allocation of these positions, we're managing our existing personnel to best fit the needs of the community and the Sheriff's Office, as opposed to just adding personnel and costs. These are not staff-level positions, but operational Deputies who will have a positive impact on the services we

provide,” said Sheriff Gerald Couch. “As I’ve said before, we will continue to seek out new ways to save taxpayer dollars without reducing the services that we provide to the community. We’re looking at the Sheriff’s Office from a brand new perspective, with the realization that there is almost always a better way to conduct business. The move to consolidate our work release programs is just one more example of how we intend to move forward with greater efficiency.”