

Bristol County Sheriff wants to close New Bedford's "money pit", Ash St. jail

"Due to some falling bricks and other easily observable façade issues, in order to get an annual occupancy permit, the BCSO was ordered by the district state building inspector to have a structural engineer assess the Ash Street Jail in New Bedford. My administration complied with that order.

The report below provided to the BCSO report shows that the **band-aid fix is about \$35,000.**

However, to properly fix the structural issues with Ash St. **is over \$3.8 million.**

It would not make sense to spend \$3.8 million on a facility that costs us about \$5 million a year to run. It makes more sense to consolidate resources at the Dartmouth jail campus.

On 18 June, 2024, I asked the state delegation of Reps and Senators who represent all or some of Bristol County to support a several phase plan to close Ash Street. That email is copied at the bottom of this email.

State Representative Chris Markey quickly told me that he would file what is needed to make the plan to close Ash St a reality. Other Reps and Senators have also pledged their support.

The steps to close Ash St and the benefits of closing the Ash Street Jail are detailed in my email to the state delegation, found below.

Let me know if

1) You have any questions, or

2) Want a tour of Ash St to see the issues, or

3) Want a tour of the Dartmouth jail to see where the regional detainees would be held after the retrofitting.”-Sheriff Paul Heroux.

REPORT:

“Hello, State Senators and State Representatives,

I am writing to you today asking for your assistance in **closing Ash Street jail** in New Bedford; it is a money pit and taking resources away from the Dartmouth campus.

The Ash Street jail has three types of people: 1) regional detainees, 2) sentenced inmates, and 3) awaiting trial inmates. I cannot close Ash Street unless I bring all three categories back to Dartmouth due to staffing issues.

The general plan follows the following steps.

1. **Receive appropriation from the state to hire a firm to redesign a retrofit for an unused kitchen on the campus in Dartmouth to accommodate the *regional detainees* who are currently held at the Ash St jail.**

a. Why do we need to do this? The unused kitchen would be retrofitted to put ‘holding cells’ to be used only for the *regional detainees*. A *regional detainee* is a person arrested by a local police department, delivered to us, and then held at my jail on Ash St in New Bedford in the *regional lock up* and held until the detainee can appear before a judge in court the next business day. We hold *regional detainees* for 19 of the 20 cities and towns in Bristol County who routinely utilize our *regional lock up*. We need to relocate this operation from New Bedford to Dartmouth in order to improve safety and save money.

2. With the new design in hand, we now also have a dollar amount on how much the retrofit would cost, which our

in-house estimate is around \$3-4 million.

3. **Receive second appropriation from the state to build the regional detainee holding cells.** This is done by a private contractor with DCAMM oversight. There is no net gain in cells.

4. Move the

a. 10-20 or so 'regional detainee operation' to the newly constructed cells in Dartmouth.

b. 80 or so regular inmates from Ash St to Dartmouth and put them in existing unused housing units in Dartmouth.

5. **Close Ash Street jail and regional lock up,** and turn it back over to the state for sale to a private developer or some other yet to be determined use.

The estimated costs for this project are modest for the gains we get.

COSTS

Retrofit design done by a firm – **approximately \$750,000**

Construction of the new regional lock up at the Dartmouth campus – **approximately \$3-4 million**

RETURN ON INVESTMENT

\$700,000 each year won't be spent on utilities and other maintenance at Ash St in New Bedford

\$2-5 million for the sale of Ash St to a private developer

SAFETY ASPECTS

By relocating the *regional lock up detainees* (and the regular inmates) to the Dartmouth Jail, we bring 45-50 COs who regularly work at Ash Street New Bedford to the Dartmouth

campus. By consolidating the security operation on one campus, we increase the security staff to inmate ratio, and we increase the amount of programming available to inmates at the Dartmouth campus, which helps with reentry decreasing recidivism. There is NO NET gain in cells; this plan reduces the number of BCSO cells by nearly 200.

SUMMARY – I am asking for your financial support to help me close Ash Street 1) in order to improve safety for all involved, and 2) save the state money by operating more efficiently on one campus.

If anyone or a group of you would like a tour of the facilities so you can better visualize the plan, let me know and we'll arrange a tour. **Please call me if you have any questions or want to talk about this.**

Sheriff Heroux.”