

# County working with Auberle to reduce Shuman's population

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By Jerome L. Sherman, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Allegheny County officials have developed a strategy for combating chronic and dangerous overcrowding at the Shuman Juvenile Detention Center.

As early as September, the Lincoln-Lemington facility could start sending young, nonviolent offenders to the Auberle Home for boys in McKeesport, which is planning to use \$2 million from the county's Department of Human Services to renovate a portion of its 18-acre main campus, add two dozen beds and hire as many as 28 new staff members.

As of yesterday, Shuman -- the largest juvenile detention center in Pennsylvania -- was at its top capacity of 130, according to Edward C. Kairys Jr., Allegheny County's assistant administrator for juvenile probation.

The number of residents has gone as high as 164 in the past year, forcing the center to place some in the infirmary or squeeze extra beds into the sleeping areas.

"We want to deal with this," said Marc Cherna, director of the Department of Human Services. "We don't want to wait."

Officials at Shuman, a "lock-down" facility with high fences and barbed wire, would screen all juveniles before sending them to Auberle, which uses less security.

Eligible youths would be between the ages of 12 and 17 and face legal action for nonviolent offenses, such as truancy or probation violations.

"We do really well with these kids, and we expect to continue to do really well with them," said John Lydon, Auberle's chief executive officer.

The new approach is modeled on Erie County's efforts to deal with overcrowding at its own 20-bed Edmund L. Thomas Detention Center.

About a decade ago, the center was "packed to the gills," said Robert Blakely, Erie County's chief juvenile probation officer. "The first reaction was, we'll just build a bigger detention center."

Instead, officials determined they could save significant amounts of money by sending nonviolent young offenders to shelters.

The state reimburses the county for 80 percent of the cost of shelter beds, but it only covers 50 percent for detention center beds, Mr. Blakely said.

He said the county's screening system has been successful at separating violent and nonviolent youths.

Today, Mr. Kairys and Mr. Lydon will travel to Erie to meet with officials there about duplicating their successes in Allegheny County.

In the first two months of the year, youths at the Shuman center attacked staff at least five times, stabbing a nurse with a pen once and, in another instance, kicking a youth care worker in the head so hard he suffered a concussion.

The incidents prompted officials with the state Department of Public Welfare to begin monitoring the center more closely, but no up-to-date figures on assaults against staff were available yesterday.

The overcrowding already keeps some nonviolent young offenders out of Shuman, Mr. Kairys said. Instead, they're often given alternative punishments, such as house arrest. But Mr. Kairys thinks the possibility of going to Auberle will serve as a better deterrent for those youths.