

# Arizona Daily Star

## Pima County to present plans for reducing jail population

By Murphy Woodhouse Arizona Daily Star

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BENJIE SANDERS / ARIZONA DAILY STAR

Inmates, under the watchful eye of a deputy, are handcuffed together as they move into the elevator to go to a courtroom in the Pima County Superior Court building.

In April, Pima County received \$1.5 million from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation to fund efforts to reduce the population at the county jail.

This Thursday, county officials will provide details to the public on how they plan to spend the money and achieve that goal. The county was one of 11 jurisdictions nationwide to receive such a grant.

Risk-screening of misdemeanor defendants, drug-abuse and mental-health screenings before initial appearances, improved court-date reminder systems and weekend warrant-resolution courts are among the proposed measures being considered by the county, according to a news release.

The county also intends to put together a so-called Community Collaborative, which will help implement the changes and be composed of justice-system officials and community members, including people who have spent time in jail, according to the release.

In 2014, there were an average of 2,136 inmates at the county jail, where the capacity is 2,377 on any given day.

The facility costs the county \$66 million a year to operate, according to the release.

Many of those held at the jail are in pretrial detention and facing misdemeanor charges or are arrested after failing to appear for court hearings, often for minor crimes. The poor and racial minorities are disproportionately represented, and many inmates have behavioral-health issues.

One of the goals of the grant is to reduce the jail's average daily population by 18 percent over three years, according to an early May memorandum from County Administrator **Chuck Huckelberry**.

That reduction would save the county well over \$2 million per year.

On the other hand, increasing the jail's capacity, even modestly, would cost millions more and likely would require bond funding, Huckelberry wrote.

The meeting will be held Thursday, June 2, from 3-5 p.m. at the YWCA at 525 N. Bonita Ave., just south of St. Mary's Road near the Santa Cruz River Park.

For further information on the program, go to [pima.gov/safetyandjustice](http://pima.gov/safetyandjustice)

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