

EAGLE TIMES

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Buying a building, not a program

To the Editor:

The Sullivan County Jail was built for 44 at optimal capacity. That is key information. It is not optimal to house more, but obviously possible.

The \$1.5 million will correct the deficiencies in the existing jail. The rest of the \$7.1 million is going into a new residential-style building. The \$5.6 million is buying a building, not a program, all the money is for a building. Buildings do not rehabilitate people.

The plan calls for rehabilitating 23 criminals for 90 days, then they live in the Transitional Housing Unit, part of the new building. So after one year, 73 criminals will be taxpaying, law-abiding citizens. After another year, 73 more of our returning guests will be rehabilitated. After another six months there are none left. We have broken the cycle, solved the problem. This is based on the statistics provided by the SCDOC promising the recidivism will go from 75 percent to 20 percent. Do the math for yourself.

The new building is being touted as costing \$200 per square foot, however, that figure doesn't include items usually included when pricing residential construction like heating systems, etc. The actual cost is \$400 per square foot and the budget doesn't include fences, alarms and sprinklers. Will this residential building hold up? Who pays for vandalism repairs?

No costs are projected for heat, electric, clerical, medical, food, sewage, snow removal, transportation, telephones, 24-hour staff, etc. What will those cost each of us and for how long? The proposed building will cost \$1,500 for each man, woman and child in our county, a one-time expense. The operating budget could exceed that.

Criminality is a form of insanity; people with mental illness should not take mind-altering substances, alcohol included. We have an extensive mental health system available if one wants to stay out of jail.

Our \$5.6 million could be put into law enforcement and our image could be less attractive for criminals instead of more inviting. If we build it, we run it, we pay for it and they will come.

It is cruel and dangerous to mislead people about the success rates of rehab for addicts. Addiction is deadly and only one in 100 people (who really want to recover) ever achieve five years. Advertising that one can use drugs and then get fixed with 90 days inpatient is dangerous and cruel to fami-

lies who get their hopes up.

A cursory review shows 66 percent of sentenced offenders are from away, mostly Vermont. Are we responsible for saving the entire world? Could the judges tell people not to come back? Just suspend their sentence on condition they don't return to this county for any reason? Is it legal?

Gail Moeller
Unity