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Jail creates access officer position serving inmates, family members

By Abby Tonsing atonsing@heraldt.com 6 hrs ago



Sam Crowe, Monroe County jail commander.

A newly-created position at the Monroe County Correctional Center will serve as a gofer between inmates inside the jail and family members on the outside.

Need help setting up an account for the jail's video visitation system? Need an inmate's signature on legal paperwork? Need assistance working the computer kiosk inside the jail's lobby? Have questions about jail policies and procedures?

The Monroe County Jail's new access officer will be the one tasked with helping people not behind bars to connect with inmates. A current jail officer will be given the new responsibilities at the beginning of next year.

"The jail is so busy people don't get the kind of service they'd like to get," Jail Commander Sam Crowe said.

Suppose a family member needs an inmate's signature on a form allowing for the release of an impounded vehicle from the nearby tow lot. And, that family member also needs the set of car keys that were logged into a property room when the inmate was booked into jail.

Right now, basic tasks like that can become frustrations for the public, inmates and staff, Sheriff Brad Swain said.

"It can go through two or three hands and take a day or so," he said. "You may call about the same issue two or three times and get different people on the phone each time."

Having one staff member assigned to be the liaison between the public and inmates should create efficiency in completing such tasks, the sheriff said.

"I think it will reduce a lot of the pressure and I think the public will appreciate it," Swain said.

Swain and Crowe said the goal of the new position is to also alleviate duties from other jail officers. The access officer will be responsible for returning personal property to an inmate upon release.

"We also think it will help reduce the workload on the rest of the jail staff because they won't be running around getting sidetracked," Swain said.

The Monroe County Council in September approved funding for five new full-time jail officers, which will increase the staff to 69 officers, with the 2019 budget.

In making his budget request, Crowe told the council the rising inmate population has increased the workload and accrued overtime of his understaffed officers.

Swain said he and Crowe will search for a candidate from existing staff as experience working at the jail is crucial to the new position.

“It will take a particular personality-type to be effective at it. We need someone who gets a lot of satisfaction in helping people and solving problems, but who isn’t gullible. We’ll have to guard against manipulation,” Swain said.

The access officer will likely work 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. Depending on the success of the new position, an additional position may be created to accommodate for evening and weekend hours.

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