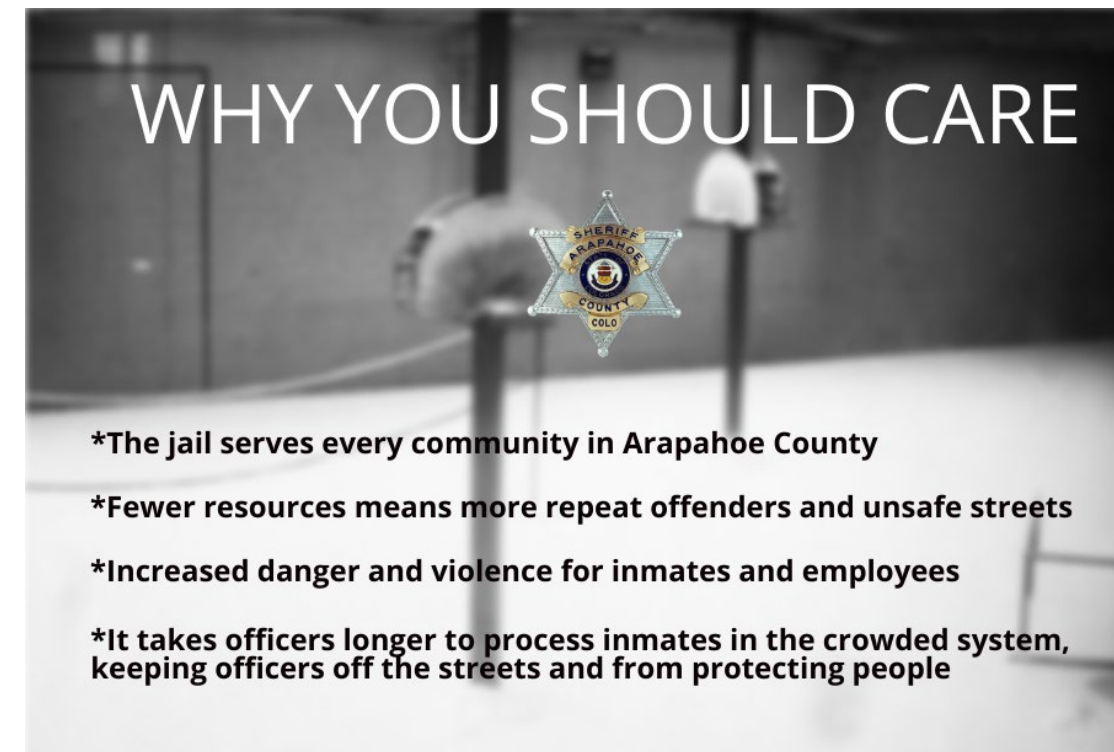




The Detention Center: Aging, outdated, dangerous

*Urgent need for new jail.
Now.*



“We're so busy, and we have so many critical tasks with no ability to expand,” Detention Services Bureau Chief Vince Line told the Littleton Independent. “It's a recipe for potential disaster.”

Walls crumble, sewage backs up, inmates crowd into pods, while the staff struggles to provide basic mental and behavioral health assistance inside the Arapahoe County Sheriff's Office jail.

The Detention Facility was built in 1986 to hold 386 inmates. But routinely, there are about three times that, some 1,100 inmates. They're triple-bunked making tempers flare, sparking violence and putting officers in danger. Crowding is just one concern.

Consider this:

- The lack of services for inmates means more repeat offenders.
- The overall infrastructure of the jail is failing. Sewage, plumbing and electrical systems are stressed in a system never designed for the number of inmates housed there today.
- The booking and release center is inadequate. Designed for 29 inmates, it often holds as many as 80. That creates long processing delays, puts the staff at risk, and means there isn't enough holding space for the many separation needs of men and women, those using drugs and alcohol, and inmates with mental and behavioral issues.
- The jail is woefully inadequate in its ability to provide care for inmates experiencing behavioral health problems. There are only eight cells for them. Twelve cells for medical care. Just a few spaces that can be used for suicide watch. Meanwhile, 40-percent of the jail population experiences behavioral health needs. That's some 400 to 450 people needing help, a larger population than the jail was originally built to house.

The solution lives at the intersection of doing what we can as a county to divert low-level offenders from jail, investing in new facilities that are safer and more efficient, and enhancing programs that work to keep people from ending up in jail again. Creating safe, modern criminal justice and judicial facilities will result in the best outcomes and make the most efficient use of funding.