



THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
OFFICE OF THE

BRISTOL COUNTY SHERIFF

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Dear Senator Rodrigues,

I am requesting that you support a \$300,000 line item in the budget to pay for a feasibility study to examine retrofitting existing jail space to accommodate 100 single cells. Doing this would allow us to close the Ash Street Jail. To be clear, it's time to close the Ash Street Jail in New Bedford, and move Ash Street inmates to the main House of Corrections in Dartmouth.

There is an empty housing unit in Dartmouth that, with 9,000 square feet of space, has ample room to be retrofitted into a unit of single jail cells to house the inmates currently at Ash Street. We hope that you will get funding for our jail system to do the first step, a feasibility study.

By way of background, the Ash Street Jail in New Bedford opened in 1888 with some parts of site construction dating back to the 1830s. For more than a century, it has housed Bristol County inmates on a range of crimes and allegations, from adultery and failure to pay a \$5 debt to rape, robbery and murder.

Ash Street is outdated, costs a fortune to maintain, and doesn't fit the needs of a modern correctional facility focused on inmate rehabilitation.

For example, inmates at the Ash Street Jail have access to 13 hours of programs per week, whereas at Dartmouth, inmates have access to 44 hours of programs on Mondays alone.

First and most importantly, the move would benefit the inmates by increasing rehabilitation, education, substance abuse and vocational training opportunities. Also, the move would save taxpayers thousands every year in utility, maintenance and transportation costs by going from a 200,000-square-foot facility at Ash Street to a more-modern 9,000-square-foot, climate controlled housing unit in Dartmouth.

This is the right thing to do for inmates, taxpayers and the community of Bristol County as a whole.

I urge you to please coordinate with the delegation to get a \$300,000 line item in the budget to fund the first step in this process, a feasibility study by the state Department of Capital Asset Management and Maintenance (DCAMM). This study will guide the rest of the proposal and show us whether it is feasible to move forward.

Many of you joined me earlier this year for a tour of our jails and a discussion on this idea. For those who were unable to join, or those who seek more information, feel free to reach out to my office any time and we'll be happy to arrange tours or answer any questions.

Paul Heroux