

VOTE NO ON PROPOSAL A!

HELP CREATE PLAN B!

Help us shape a "Plan B" that reflects the values of our community.

Proposal A (the jail millage on the ballot on Feb.22) was compiled by a group of "in house" professionals called the Criminal Justice Collaborative Council (CJCC). Their combined "wish list" for additional money is truly massive, and is mostly for operational funds. Jail operation is one of the very few legally required duties of a county, and citizens already pay over 5.5 mills in county taxes. (It is an odd strategy for the county to request .75 mills, with no community involvement in the proposal, after their .25 mill plan was voted down in 1998, and their .35 mill plan was rejected in 2000).

The proposed \$314 million program will provide the template for our incarceration policies for coming decades in Washtenaw County, and must not be allowed to slide through in a "business as usual" manner. We must take the time to involve local citizens and experts to craft a criminal justice plan that represents the best creative, innovative, and effective thinking in our community.

Since statistics show that the jail will mostly house African Americans and people from Ypsilanti we must analyze this situation, and have funds to provide probation programs and neighborhood alternatives in Ypsilanti.

It is somewhat presumptuous to delineate a "Plan B", since the core assumption is that it will emerge from the work of interested and involved citizens. "Plan B" thinking at this time is focused on a) lower cost, b) mental health concerns, c) shifting substance abuse control to a non-criminal "harm reduction" model.

- a) Millage requested for Plan B should be at the .3 or .35 mill level. This would provide over \$130 million in new funds. If they are needed, all the proposed buildings could be built at a cost of "only" \$48 million. Over \$80 million would become available for creative programming that the community believes in. This sum would avert the need for massive firings; jail operating funds are supposed to come from the general fund budget anyway.
- b) Mental Health concerns are addressed by the county proposal, but little new or creative thinking is in evidence. The mental health program should be separated from the court and the sheriffs department. Consistent with public safety, mental patients must be diverted from jail and housed at a different site. Experts at the major universities in our county have studied these questions for decades and must be asked for comment. We know that mental patients in Michigan have simply been thrown out on the street, and a criminal justice setting is not the optimal therapeutic environment.
- c) Substance abuse policy in no way reflects new concepts or paradigms; the politicians have fallen far behind the thinking of our citizens. Washtenaw County citizens understand that our 35 year "American Inquisition" called the "Drug War" has failed utterly. Americans use far more illegal drugs than other countries, and the price of hard drugs has plummeted while their purity has hugely increased. Drug war has increased the American prison population 500% since 1971.

Washtenaw county authorities obfuscate these concerns by being unwilling or unable to answer basic questions such as;

- 1) How many drug prisoners have committed an actual crime and how many are in jail simply for their private use of a substance that “the system” has arbitrarily decided that it doesn’t like. If we did not jail people for “possession” or “use” (as is done in many European countries) would we free up jail beds?
- 2) How much money is spent to enforce laws about cannabis? Voters in this county have repeatedly made clear that our current laws concerning this ancient, benign, and helpful herb are absurd. Why can’t the county clearly state that cannabis laws are their “lowest priority” and leave citizens alone who are not bothering anyone else?
- 3) How can we possibly justify the expense and absurdity of Washtenaw County paying for an average of around 10,000 urine screens for cannabis each year - when county voters for the past 30 years have made it so crystal clear that they are not concerned about cannabis? Would we rather have these folks drink booze, sniff glue, or smoke crack (since these chemicals quickly clear from the body)? Are cannabis screens (or other drug tests) used to re-incarcerate people? How many other large budget items such as this could simply be eliminated?
- 4) If someone is a long term opiate addict do we have methadone maintenance easily and readily available, or do we force that person to become a dealer and recruit our children to become the next generation of Junkies?

These questions just scratch the surface, but the county steadfastly will not answer them.

ONE OF THE MAIN REASONS THIS JAIL PROPOSAL MUST BE SOUNDLY DEFEATED IS THAT WE WILL OTHERWISE NEVER BE ABLE TO GET THE INFORMATION WE NEED TO ANALYZE AND REFORM THE SYSTEM.

WASHTENAW COUNTY MISSION STATEMENT “To represent the citizens of Washtenaw County and be responsible for all County services”

Doesn’t that mean that County services (like courts and jail programs) should be structured in a way that our citizens approve of? Isn’t this best accomplished by getting citizens involved in the earliest planning stages, not by having law enforcement professionals extrapolate current “standard operating procedure” into a gigantic “wish list”.

VOTE NO FEBRUARY 22! CREATE A BETTER, LESS EXPENSIVE PLAN!

The Citizens Alliance on Prisons and Public Spending (CAPPS) recently commissioned a statewide poll of the public’s attitude toward crime prevention, incarceration, and parole policies. The Poll found “voters are more willing to consider changing current corrections policies than most elected officials realize”. (see www.capps-mi.org for more info)

To help defeat the Giant Jail call Chuck Ream 761-5869