

Sheriff Heroux requests legislative funding for study to close New Bedford's Ash Street Jail

"It's budget season on Beacon Hill, and Bristol County Sheriff Paul Heroux is asking lawmakers to move forward on exploring his idea of closing the Ash Street Jail in New Bedford.

Sheriff Heroux this week sent letters to members of the local legislative delegation to request \$300,000 for a feasibility study on closing Ash Street and moving inmates to a renovated housing unit inside the House of Corrections in Dartmouth.

"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)," Sheriff Heroux wrote to the delegation members. "This study will guide the rest of the proposal and show us whether it is feasible to move forward."

The Ash Street Jail opened in 1888 with parts of site construction dating back to the 1830s. While clean, safe and secure, it does not fit the needs of a modern corrections system focused on inmate rehabilitation while being responsible with taxpayers' money.

The Ash Street Jail costs more than \$5 million a year to operate, and is about 200,000 square feet, with outdated classrooms and limited space for treatment programs. The empty housing unit in Dartmouth he seeks to renovate into single cells and move Ash Street Jail inmates to, the GC unit, is 9,000 square feet and located near the main hubs of education and substance abuse programming.

“First and most importantly, the move would benefit the inmates by increasing rehabilitation, education, substance abuse and vocational training opportunities,” Sheriff Heroux said. “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. Closing Ash Street and moving the operation to Dartmouth will quickly pay for itself.”

Sheriff Heroux also invited lawmakers who could not attend the previous tour and information session to come and visit the correctional facilities to learn more about the project and ask questions.”