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Wire Report
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Canyon County saw record in ‘mental hold’ cases in July

CALDWELL — Canyon County saw a record number of involuntary mental hold cases in July.

There were 123 such cases, a monthly record, according to the county’s director of indigent services, Yvonne Baker, the Idaho Press Tribune reported. The county also set a record for payments related to those mental holds in the past few weeks, sending out checks totaling \$153,000, Controller Zach Wagoner said.

Police and medical personnel can initiate a “mental hold” if they’re worried a person is a danger to themselves or others. A person is taken to an emergency room or a psychiatric hospital for evaluation and treatment. A judge has to be notified of such holds within 24 hours, a move that triggers the filing of a case.

The rising numbers and costs of involuntary mental holds have prompted county officials, lawmakers and others to discuss bringing a state-funded behavior health crisis center to the county. The group met for the second time publicly Thursday to discuss that option.

Canyon County Commissioner Tom Dale said he wants those involved in the discussion to come back with a potential model for the crisis center, including to pay for it, and start hammering out the details.

That model and funding sources can then be presented to the state Legislature for consideration, Dale said.

The Legislature has so far funded four crisis centers in different regions around the state. Each center received \$200,000 for onetime startup costs and then \$1.5 million for two years to support the operations. After that, the centers have to come up with local money to pay for half, said Jared Tatro with the Legislative Services Office.

A crisis center could not only provide cost savings but also better behavioral health care for the patient, said Ed Castledine, hospital administrator for St. Luke’s Nampa.

When a person experiences a mental health crisis and is deemed a danger to themselves or others, that person has to be taken an emergency department for an evaluation. Once there, law enforcement officers and hospital staff have to stay with the subject for hours at a time. That contributes to overtime for law enforcement and ties up beds in the emergency department that other patients need.

The county is responsible for that person’s entire medical bill when that person is under a mental hold. The average hold is 5 1/2 days.

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