

County approves contract with ICE

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The Lake County Board of Commissioners approved a contract with ICE to house and transport inmates at its meeting Feb. 12. (Star photo/Cathie Crew)

BALDWIN — Since severing the contract with the Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC) to house Residential Re-entry Program (RRP) inmates, county officials and the Lake County Sheriff's Department have worked to find a use for the Lake County jail annex.

An intergovernmental service agreement with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to house and transport inmates was approved by the Lake County Board of Commissioners at its meeting Feb. 12.

Chairman Howard Ludholtz said. "I think it's a good deal," "It will mean more money and more jobs."

Among the highlights of the contract:

- The bed day rate is \$86 per detainee
- Transport/escort/stationary services will cost \$39.30 per hour
- If transport/escort/stationary service workers work overtime, they will be paid \$53.90 per hour
- Mileage reimbursement is based on the U.S. General Services Administration annual issuance, which for 2020 is about 58 cents per mile
- The duration is indefinite, but can be ended by either party by serving 90 days notice

Lake said the contract would involve housing prisoners from GEO Group, Inc. North Lake Correctional Facility that have served their time and have been released.

"They would come here and be housed in our facility for up to 72 hours, then they would be transported to wherever they are required to go from here," he said.

Lake County Undersheriff Wesley Bierling said ICE wants to contract with the sheriff's department to provide transport services for the entire Grand Rapids field office, which includes 13 counties.

Other transports would involve various inmates from a variety of situations, where ICE would tell the sheriff's office when they have someone that needs to be transported and where they need to go, he added.

"Over the last six months, they have had around 200 releases," Bierling said. "That would mean every day we would be driving somewhere, picking someone up and dropping them off somewhere else. That would require two corrections officers from our jail."

Bierling requested that the board approve the recall of corrections officers that had been laid off as a result of the cancellation of the RRP contract in order to fulfill the contract services.

"This doesn't add or create new positions; it just lets us recall some that have been laid off," Lake said. "The was part of our goal all along to get some people re-employed."

The board unanimously approved the recall of former corrections officers.

According to Bierling, the facility needs to be brought into compliance with ICE standards before the contract can go into effect. Inspections will have to take place, and everything will have to be approved by ICE for transport and housing, he said.