ARTICLES OF INTEREST

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Powhatan

Localities want OK to enact meals tax

Board asks assembly for help in dealing with state shortfall

BY JAMIE C. RUFF
Times-Dispatch Staff Writer

POWHATAN — The Powhatan County Board of Supervisors is asking the General Assembly to allow it and other localities to enact a meals tax without a referendum.

The request is one of several the board included in a resolution of budget and revenue recommendations for the General Assembly to consider during its 2009 session as the county faces a drop in state revenue.

The resolution, advocated by the Virginia Association of Counties, also asks the state to use its Revenue Stabilization Fund — the rainy day fund — to help offset budget reductions and to reconsider recent state tax exemptions.

The resolution opposes unfunded and under-funded mandates that will impose costs on local governments, and asks the assembly to consider other strategies to mitigate the impact of state cuts on local governments.

Acting County Attorney Roger C. Wiley Jr. said the Association of Counties is not seeking anything it has not sought before.

The localities are seeking the changes to help combat the $3 billion shortfall the state is facing and its subsequent effect on local government.

Supervisor Carson Tucker said that in recent years, the state has told localities that there is no more money and there is nothing a locality can do about it. "This is an attempt to rectify that," Tucker said.

"I'm sure a lot of localities will be sending this [resolution] to their legislators," County Administrator Carolyn Cios said.

Familiar theme

- The principal issue at this year's General Assembly will be the state budget. Editorial, Page A14.

• Contact Jamie C. Ruff at (434) 223-3678 or jruff@timesdispatch.com.

The number of older prisoners in Virginia has more than doubled in the past 10 years, creating new [illegible] the state's prison system.

Growing old behind bars

Aloysius Beyrer, 8[illegible] is in the infirmary [illegible] Deerfield Correc[illegible]tional Center. He [illegible] the state's oldest [illegible]mate and one of a [illegible] large number of ge[illegible]atric inmates being [illegible] housed and cared [illegible] at the facility in South[illegible]ampton County.

Beyrer is serving 10[illegible] years for sex crim[illegible]

BY FRANK GREEN
Times-Dispatch Staff Writer

CAPRON

Winter sunshine slices through a narrow security window and falls on Aloysius Joseph Beyrer's white hair, slight shoulders and the linen covering his fractured hip.

Like the rest of the country, Virginia is coping with a growing number of aging inmates. Beyrer, 84, is the state's oldest and his home, the Deerfield Correctional Center, focuses on geriatric inmates.

RT-D FIRST

In 1999, Virginia had 2,015 prisoners 50 or older. Today, there are almost 4,700, and by 2011, state officials expect there to be 5,057.

A drop in the number of paroles granted to inmates who remain eligible is a factor in Virginia's increasing number of older inmates. Truth-in-sentencing reforms that in 1995 led to stiffer, no-parole sentences for violent crimes are expected to contribute to Virginia's aging prison population in coming years.

At Deerfield, wheelchairs and walkers [illegible] assisted-living [illegible] would be easy to [illegible]

See PRISON, Page A6

Graying behind bars Virginia has a special facility to house older inmates. TimesDispatch.com keyword: slideshows

Prison

From Page A1

idents with those in nursing homes. But it would be a mistake to do so.

Beyrer, a veteran of prisons in Virginia and elsewhere, thinks Deerfield "is pretty good," though security comes first there, even for octogenarians like Beyrer, who is serving 100 years for sex crimes. The prison's goal is to provide older inmates care and some dignity, not freedom.

The warden, Keith W. Davis, who has a master's degree in social work, makes it clear he is not running a spa for the golden years. "This is not a perfect world. We do not have unlimited resources," he said.

Even with a blank check to meet all their medical and mental-health needs, Davis said no one wants to grow old or die in a prison. "That's a big challenge for the staff. . . . We do what we can do, but we can't cure oldness," he said.

"Offenders are like the rest of us. We get old, we get ill, we die," he said. Deerfield provides a continuing-care community, he said, "so they can reach what we believe is their fullest potential — body, mind and soul."

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Experts say substance abuse, little or no health care before imprisonment and the stress of living behind bars can leave a 50-year-old inmate physiologically 10 to 15 years older than his chronological age.

In general, older inmates require more supervision and medical and mental-health care, as well as special diets, mobility aids and special housing.

Deerfield, Virginia's only prison dedicated to geriatric inmates and inmates with special medical needs, accommodates 1,080 inmates, 90 of them in wheelchairs and 65 percent over the age of 50.

Other older inmates and older female inmates are in prisons such as the Fluvanna Correctional Center for Women and the Greensville and Powhatan correctional centers.

Critics point out that many older inmates are far less likely to commit new crimes and could be released at great savings. Prison officials, however, believe their care would largely be at public expense in or out of prison.

And though older people are less likely to commit crimes, some still do. Beyrer was 67 when he was convicted in Virginia Beach of statutory rape, aggravated sexual battery and forcible sodomy.

Deerfield's head nurse, Bonita Badgett, said 800 of the inmates there have at least one chronic medical condition such as diabetes, high blood pressure or asthma. The prison psychiatrist, Dr. Amit Shah, said the major problem he treats is depression.

In October alone, the prison handled 5,200 prescriptions.

Badgett has a staff of 14 registered nurses, 25 licensed practical nurses and 21 nursing assistants. Two physicians are at the prison three days a week and the psychiatrist visits once a week. At least one registered nurse is on hand at all times.

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Deerfield was selected 10 years ago as the site for older offenders. An expansion opened in 2007 and there is now an 18-bed infirmary, a 57-bed assisted-living dorm, a larger ancillary care dorm, a dorm for diabetics and a dorm for other special-needs inmates.

More than 75 percent of Deerfield's

"Offenders [illegible] like the rest of us. We g[illegible] we die," sa[illegible] den Keith W[illegible]

prisoners have [illegible] nearly 30 percent [illegible] curity measures [illegible] health-care needs" [illegible] Mayes, chief of security [illegible]

"These guy[illegible] ical needs an[illegible] usual [and po[illegible] of equipment [illegible] low theft" to [illegible] wouldn't see in another prison," he said.

Officers must be sensitive to prisoners who are gravely ill, suffering a heart attack or a stroke. But not be deceived by someone who is faking to get an advantage to facilitate an escape," Mayes said.

Not everyone at Deerfield is happy. More than 200 inmates signed a letter to Gov. Timothy M. Kaine last year complaining about the parole board's low grant rate. One inmate claims staff stole his pain medication as he recovered from an injury.

Parole issues aside, inmates interviewed during a recent tour said they liked Deerfield.

James Henry Tinsley, 59, and partially paralyzed, has been there since 2003. "I been locked up 26 years," said Tinsley, convicted of 55 felonies, including capital murder, robbery and burglary.

"You've got some good people here. I ain't got nothin' bad to say about 'em. . . . As far as the medical, I give it a double A plus," he said.

Another well-traveled inmate, William H. Glazebrook, 74, has been in the state system for 25 years and at Deerfield for a year and a half. "This is Boy Scout Camp compared to the rest of 'em. This is a bell of a place," he said.

The Rev. Lynn Robinson, the prison chaplain, says, "These guys here, man, this is a special group of fellows." He said the inmates recently arranged to have Thanksgiving food baskets sent to five families and raised $500 for breast-cancer research.

"The one thing, I think, the community can be aware of is that [illegible] they need support when they [illegible] home," Robinson said.

Also, he said, "Saturdays and Sundays are visiting days, and some of them have family in the general area, and for some reason they don't come to see them. They need to stay in contact with [their] children."

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Beyrer, Virginia's oldest inmate, was a resident of Deerfield's infirmary in November. Aside from six 1992 felony convictions, little information was available about Beyrer because of privacy rules.

He says that he was a once a prisoner at California's San Quentin State Prison. California authorities could not confirm they had ever held him, but New York state archives show he was released from Attica Correctional Facility in 1956.

Dawn Mosena, the nurse manager of the infirmary, said inmates are held there for observation and treatment before and after hospitalization, in addition to long-term care and special-needs inmates such as Beyrer.

She said the staff is planning how to make room for what is expected to be more long-term patients such as Beyrer.

Last year, an inmate's mother was allowed to be with her son in the infirmary when he died. "We want the patient to feel comfortable and the family to feel comfortable and know that they can be with them in those last hours," Mosena said.

"We want to get a hospice program going," she added.

Davis said another problem is that, "a lot of these guys have outlived their families. . . . We could open the door to let them go, and where would they go?"

Badgett, Deerfield's head nurse, agreed. "Some of them we had to keep beyond their release date because we couldn't find a placement for them. There was no family out there, no home, there was nowhere to send them," she said.

Sex offenders, particularly, are difficult to place. Most nursing homes do not want them, and families often reject them because of their crimes, or, "the families simply cannot take care of the needs and medications."

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At Deerfield, younger and healthier inmates — dubbed "pushers," short for wheelchair pushers — assist the older inmates and perform a wide variety of essential jobs for 45 cents an hour, primarily janitorial and in health care that help keep the prison running.

One "pusher," James Lee Wainwright, 47, imprisoned in 1990 for armed robbery, helps in the infirmary. He said he has also assisted with health care at another prison before arriving at Deerfield.

"I plan on taking it up when I get out of here," he said.

An infirmary nurse said, "We couldn't function without these guys, literally without their eyes and their help."

William Robison, chief psychologist at Deerfield, said some inmate helpers perform odious jobs, peculiar to hospitals and rest homes, for infirm inmates. A program has been set up to help the helpers, Robison said.

"The caregivers support group is . . . for guys who are caring for other guys here. You know, if that isn't therapeutic education, what the hell is?" Robison asked.

"It's a little different here, the way we even think of mental health. We try and redeem a guy."

Said Robinson: "What we do is to find them a purposefulness in living in prison and maybe dying in here." He is familiar with programs in other states and said, "I think we're light years ahead."

"We're not soft on crime. Tough love 'em, and they could still die here with some atonement . . . with a sense of humanity and self worth."

• Contact Frank Green at (804) 649-6340 or fgreen@timesdispatch.com.

Inmate James Wainwright brings lunch to fellow inmate Ottie Bailey in the infirmary at Deerfield Correctional Center. Inmates such as Wainwright [illegible] e paid 45 cents an hour to help care for other inmates.

GROWING OLD BEHIND BARS

EVA RUSSO/TIMES-DISPATCH

Arthur Harcum, 70, reads "Beyond Valor" in the assisted-living area at Deerfield Correctional Center in Southampton County.

Expenses higher for geriatric prisoners

The annual cost per inmate at Deerfield is placed at $27,985

BY FRANK GREEN
Times-Dispatch Staff Writer

The Virginia Department of Corrections is required to provide all inmates with "needed health care for medical, dental and mental-health services consistent with community standards."

According to the department, in the fiscal year that ended June 30, 2007, the annual cost per inmate at the Deerfield Correctional Center was $27,985, compared with $23,246 per capita systemwide and $16,000 to $17,000 a year at medium-security dormitory facilities.

A recent survey of 41 states and the U.S. Bureau of Prisons by Corrections Today found there were almost 125,000 inmates 50 or older, but fewer than 10,000 beds in facilities dedicated to older inmates.

The Corrections Today report predicts the nation's older inmate population could increase tenfold in the next decade and the associated health costs could double that.

Any Virginia inmate — except those who have committed capital murder — is eligible for a geriatric parole if 60 and has served at least 10 years of a sentence, or if the inmate is 65 and has served at least five years of the sentence.

There have been just nine geriatric releases by the parole board, though the board notes many inmates who are paroled did not apply for a geriatric release.

The Virginia Criminal Sentencing Commission projects the number of inmates eligible for geriatric release will double from 500 in 2007, to 1,003 by 2010.

The Department of Corrections says many are rejected for geriatric parole because of the serious nature of their crimes. The department has been monitoring the geriatric population and has been issuing reports for each of the last three years.

The department hopes to add a [illegible]-bed nursing unit, an [illegible]-bed assisted-living unit and a [illegible]-bed Alzheimer's unit at Deerfield for $24 million. The department is also planning for a $171 million, 150-bed hospital at the Powhatan Correctional Center to serve the entire system.

• Contact Frank Green at (804) 649-6340 or fgreen@timesdispatch.com.