



County of Milwaukee

Office of the Sheriff

David A. Clarke Jr.
Sheriff

Date: February 17, 2014

To: Supervisor Marina Dimitrijevic, Chairwoman, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors

Fr: Richard R. Schmidt, Inspector, Office of the Sheriff

Re: **Informational report from the Office of the Sheriff on the status of inmate video visitation.**

Background Information

Cremer Engineering, the lowest bidder, installed the current Inmate Video Visitation System in 2002. Cremer Engineering, who is no longer in existence, installed the system under the trademark of "Prison Vision". This secure solution provided families and friends the opportunity to visit with their loved ones via video technology.

Shortly after the installation, the system began experiencing system failures which the contractor failed to totally alleviate. As the system aged, the failures continued. The vendor was unable to properly troubleshoot the failures and come up with a solution. MCSO staff found that rebooting the system and workstation resolved some of the failures of the system. The system needed to be rebooted several times throughout the visiting sessions which caused a strained on it. Over the years, the hardware (monitors, Cremer boxes, handsets and cameras) failed, and replacement parts were available and repairs were made by MCSO and County staff.

Approximately two years ago, the hardware became obsolete and was no longer available. The vendor, Cremer Engineering, went out of business. Support for the equipment and software was non-existent. Milwaukee County electricians and MCSO Special Projects staff have taken parts from units to "band-aid" the equipment to keep the system limping along.

In late 2012, three of the 24 booths in Visiting had no audio or video capabilities and no replacement parts were available rendering them inoperable. Out of the 71 visiting booths in the jail, 21 booths had no audio or video capabilities and no replacement parts were available rendering them inoperable. The reduced amount of functioning visiting booths, coupled with the 450 visits per week from family members, placed an enormous strain on this outdated system causing delays and shortened visits in an attempt to accommodate everyone. At this time, visiting was occurring three days per week (Tuesday, Saturday and Sunday).

In March 2013, visiting hours and the number of visiting stations were reduced to place the least amount of strain on an already fragile system. Each housing unit had one booth operational and hardware from other booths was being used to maintain the functionality of each booth in the housing unit. In October, the hardware failed in two housing units and no more parts could be scavenged to fix them.

On December 8, 2013, the entire system failed and all video was lost. The booths that still functioned could only produce audio for the visitor who had traveled. For all intensive purposes, a phone call is what the visitor received for their travel. No one from IMSD, Special Projects or County electricians could repair the system.

Today, we continue to offer only audio visits on a fragile and fragmented system that has no guarantees to work. The system could fail at any time which would result in no inmate visitation at the Milwaukee County Jail.

The industry standard for the life span of such technology is five to seven years – the system in the Milwaukee County Jail is on its twelfth year.

The Office of the Sheriff submitted Capital Project improvements to replace the existing system three consecutive years and listed it as a number one priority, however, it did not make it to the Finance Committee hearings.

Requirement

DOC 350 Administrative Code states that a jail must have a Policy / Procedure for visitation:

- **DOC Administrative Code 350.17(b):** Statement of the policies of the facility on inmate programs, including inmate health screening and care, suicide prevention, control and administration of medications, communicable disease control, mail, visitation, religious programming, recreation, reading materials, and canteen.

Additionally, DOC 350.23 outlines the parameters for visitation:

- **DOC 350.23 Visitation:** The manual under s. DOC 350.17 shall contain policies and procedures relating to visitation, including the following components:
 - (1) Establishment of visitation schedule for family, friends, attorneys and others.
 - (2) Establishment of procedures for requesting visitation during nonscheduled times.
 - (3) Documentation of all visits through a visitor log or register.
 - (4) Establishment of a search policy of visitors and their possessions.
 - (5) Posting of visitation policies and procedures, including visitation schedule, in a place readily accessible to visitors and inmates.

Consequences of a failed system

- The constituents of Milwaukee County and family and friends of the incarcerated are not able to visit their loved ones and **we would be in violation of DOC Administrative Code 350.**
- Inmates are not able to visit with clergy that often use the video visiting system for spiritual enrichment.
- Inmates tend to regress if they do not have contact / support from family and friends outside of their confinement.

Solution

Utilization of a system offered by our current Inmate Telephone Vendor, CenturyLink

The vendor has proposed a **no cost** solution to our “end of life” video visitation system. They have proposed a beta test as an extension of the services they currently provide. The vendor will provide three testing stations (one in a male housing unit; one in a female housing unit and one in Visiting for family and friends to utilize). This proposal for beta testing by CenturyLink is good for a 60-day period. During installation of this beta test system, MCSO will begin the RFP process for a long-term solution.

Advantages:

- Family and friends who visit using the system in the jail lobby will receive a free 20-minute visit.
- Family and friends who utilize this technology from home will be able to have children visit with their parent.
- Visitors would be charged \$.50 per minute of visit time when they use a computer or smart phone off-site, thus eliminating the need to travel and park downtown.
- Inmate visitation would be expanded from three days per week to seven days per week thus accommodating the schedules of family and friends.
- The vendor would own and assume all maintenance of the equipment.
- The vendor would provide, at their cost, a technician 24/7/365 to repair phones / equipment.
- The County does not assume any of the system costs.

Disadvantages:


- Special attention is necessary when registering visitors to ensure the correct person is visiting the inmate and restraining orders and court orders are not violated.
- Inmate family and friends would be charged a “per minute” fee for the visits.
- RFP will take a minimum of three months and will delay a long-term solution.

Summation

The Sheriff’s Office has been diligent in trying to facilitate the replacement of a 14-year old fragile and failing Video Visitation System via the Capital Project submission process. The system is frail and there are no guarantees for its continued functionality and there are no options for repair.

On Thursday, February 6th, 2014, I met with with Dr. Amber Moreen, County Executive’s Chief of Staff, and Dr. Raisa Koltun, County Executive’s Director of Legislative Affairs, to discuss the above option and we are all in agreement that this is the most viable and reasonable action to take.

The inmates and their loved ones are entitled to a functioning video visitation system and our current system falls short. The audio portion is frail, is not supported and could fail at any time which will result in no more visiting in the Milwaukee County Jail.


Richard R. Schmidt, Inspector
Office of the Sheriff, Milwaukee County

cc: Chris Abele, County Executive
Supervisor Theodore Lipscomb, Sr., Chair, Judiciary, Safety & General Services