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County of Milwaukee
Office of the Sheriff

Date: January 7, 2014

To: Supervisor Marina Dimitrijevic, Chairman, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors
From: Richard Schmidt, Inspector, Office of the Sheriff
Subject: **Informational report from the Office of the Sheriff regarding inmate video visiting**

Background

The current video visitation system was installed in 2002. The lowest bidder was chosen, Cremer Engineering. The system met the immediate need. It provided a secure solution to allow families and friends to visit inmates utilizing video visiting 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. Over the years the hardware (monitors, Cremer boxes, handsets, and cameras) failed and replacements were available.

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 became 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 March 2013 visiting hours and the number of visiting stations were reduced in an effort to reduce the strain on the fragile equipment. Each housing unit was limited to one booth. The hardware in the unused booths was used to keep the remaining booths functioning. In October the hardware failed in two housing units and no more parts could be scavenged to fix the visiting booths.

On December 8, 2013 all video was lost. The booths that still function only produce audio for both the inmate and the visitor. Special projects staff, the county electricians and IMSD were not able to restore the video. We continue to offer visits with audio only. When the audio portion fails, inmate visiting at the Milwaukee County Jail (MCJ) will end.

The industry standard for the life span of similar systems is five to seven years. MCSO's system limped along for 11 years.

The Sheriff's Office submitted, three years in a row, capital improvement requests to replace the video visiting system. The request in 2013 for the 2014 Capital Improvement Budget was listed as a number one priority. The project did not make it to the Finance Committee hearings for the Capital Improvement budget for 2014.

Consequences of the failed system

- All jails in the state of Wisconsin must abide by state Administrative code DOC350. Inmates must be allowed visits from certain members of the public.
- The Constituents of Milwaukee County and family and friends of the incarcerated are not able to visit with the inmates.
- Inmates tend to regress if they do not have contact with family and friends outside of their confinement.
- Inmates are not able to visit with their own clergy that often use the video visiting system for spiritual enrichment.

Solutions

The repeated requests for allocating money through the capital improvement process have failed. We are now faced with three options.

1. An emergency allocation of funds to replace the video visiting system. We would piggy back off of the current Video Visiting Contract for the House of Correction.
2. Enlist the services of the current inmate phone vendor to beta test and ultimately utilize their video visiting system.
3. Write, publish, and evaluate a Request for Proposal for video visiting vendors. An RFP process would take a minimum of three months. This would result in a significant delay. The video visiting system would not be operational until 2015.

Analysis of Option 1 and 2

Utilize current HOC Video Visiting Vendor

Replacing the current MCJ video visiting system would involve removing the existing hardware and pulling network wiring, new hardware installation, network switches, software, storage devices, and an application server. The total estimated cost for project completion is \$1,542,170. This was the amount submitted as a capital improvement. The County would own all of the hardware components.

Advantages

- A proper installation would allow visitors to go to either location (HOC or MCJ) to visit an inmate at either location.

- This system currently does not charge for visits. All visits are on-site visits. The vendor does have an optional module whereby the visitors can initiate a visit off-site. A fee is associated with the visit. This option has never been fully explored because it creates bandwidth issues on the County WAN and additional Time Warner service would have to be leased to accommodate off-site visits.
- Visitors only have to register as a visitor one time. If the inmate gets transferred from one facility to another the visitor does not have to register again.
- All recordings are stored on-site.

Disadvantages

- The vendor is not local and they contract out the service on the hardware on an as needed basis. County staff usually performs the minor repairs more expediently.
- This proposal would also have ongoing annual maintenance costs which include software upgrades. HOC maintenance cost for 2013 was approximately \$18,000.
- The current County network will not support the information flow and the bandwidth issue would need to be resolved.

Utilize a new system offered by the Inmate Telephone Vendor

The vendor has proposed a **no cost** solution to our "end of life" video visitation system. They propose a beta test of their video visitation system as an extension of the services they currently provide. Initially they will provide three units (one in the visitation area and one in both a Women's and Men's pod) for our evaluation.

After the beta test period, if accepted by the County, the system will be expanded to provide ample service to all of the pods and the visitation area on a revenue share basis and at **no cost to the County**. The County would not own any of the equipment. A separate contract for the video visiting offered by the vendor would be negotiated.

Advantages

- If visitors come to the jail to visit, the 20 minute visit will be free, but there would be limited stations available.
- Visitors would be charged \$.50 per minute of visit time when the visitor uses a computer or smart phone off site.
- Inmates would initiate the visit during the time frames that the inmates have access to the dayroom. This would extend visiting from 3 days per week to 7 days per week.
- The vendor would own the equipment and assume all the maintenance of the equipment. They currently provide a technician 24/7/365 to repair phones and this service would extend to the visiting system.
- The County does not assume any of the system costs.

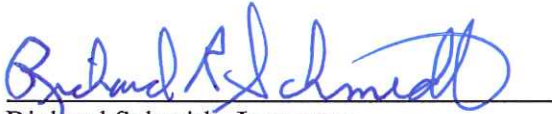
Disadvantages

- The County would have to purchase additional storage if we needed to maintain the recorded visits for longer than 3 months.
- 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.

Summary

The Sheriff's Office has been diligent in trying to facilitate the replacement of the video visiting system. The current system is past its useful life. There are no available options to service or repair the existing system.

The inmates are entitled to visit with their family and friends while incarcerated at the Milwaukee County Jail. The current system of audio only visits does not meet the visiting needs of Milwaukee County Jail inmates. The audio portion of the frail system could fail at any time. When this happens the Milwaukee County Jail will not be able to offer visits to the inmates. The longer we wait to make the decision the longer the inmates and their family and friends will not have contact with each other.



Richard Schmidt, Inspector
Office of the Sheriff, Milwaukee County

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