

Bay Area sheriffs schmooze with top boss, Jeff Sessions

By [Otis R. Taylor Jr.](#), San Francisco Chronicle
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Photo: Michael Macor, The Chronicle

Contra Costa County Sheriff David Livingston poses for a portrait in Oakland Calif. on Thursday Dec. 6, 2012. Livingston is considering a reversal of policy to hand over illegal immigrants to ICE who are in custody for various crimes.

On the same day the Contra Costa County Sheriff's Office requested approval from the Board of Supervisors for a jail expansion, the agency's top cop, Sheriff David Livingston, was in Washington, D.C., schmoozing with Jeff Sessions, the recently confirmed attorney general.

Livingston was one of six California sheriffs who provided an audience for the man who will drive the White House's anti-immigration policies. Sonoma County Sheriff Steve Freitas was also there.

“I spoke with him about public safety and the help the Federal Government can provide us to make our communities safe,” Livingston said in a statement to reporters.

Livingston’s department happens to hold a multimillion-dollar contract with the feds to run a federal immigration detention center out of one of its two jails: the West County Detention Facility in Richmond.

The county is paid \$82 per day per detainee for holding people for deportation on the government’s behalf. And it holds about 200 immigrants a day, which adds up to \$6 million a year.

So, it’s no wonder the Sheriff’s Office is complaining that it needs to expand its Richmond jail to alleviate overcrowding at its Martinez jail.

On Feb. 7, the Contra Costa Board of Supervisors voted 4-1 to fund an expansion of the West County Detention Facility. A majority of the funding for the \$95 million project will come from a \$70 million grant — if the California Board of State and Community Corrections accepts the proposal submitted by Contra Costa.

Livingston has been pushing for this for two years. But it’s not a done deal, because there are several counties applying to the jail funding program.

If approved, it will cost the county \$25 million for construction and \$5 million a year to run. The annual cost includes \$2 million for additional staffing.

So what will the county receive from a 150,000-square-foot expansion?

The addition of a high-security wing that will allow the transfer of about 400 inmates currently housed at the overcrowded Martinez Detention Facility. I’m told the facility in Martinez won’t close, and there will still be 300 beds there.

The Sheriff's Office has said it wants to offer more mental health programming and re-entry services, programs that haven't been available because of space. But what about crime prevention?

"We need to be putting more of our investment in prevention services to keep people out of jail," said John Gioia, the lone supervisor who opposed the expansion plan. "From a monetary standpoint, it's not the best investment."

I've sought comment from Livingston about the county's collaboration with the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the agency commonly referred to as ICE, to deport people from an area listed as a sanctuary.

How many of the new beds will be used to increase the number of ICE detainees?

I can't get Livingston to return my calls, but I bet Sessions, who vehemently opposes immigration reform that would allow immigrants in the country illegally to remain, can get him on the phone.

Sessions now has oversight of local police forces and federal civil rights laws, and that should scare people.

Since the country elected a clueless president, it's the people in his Cabinet, like Sessions, who will be wreaking havoc as they storm the halls of justice.

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