

State senators listen to frustrations with crime

(KLZA)-- A crowd estimated at 200 attended the third meeting of the Taking Back Our Community group Tuesday evening at the Falls City High School Auditorium.

First District State Senator Dan Watermeier and District 32 State Senator Laura Ebke who chairs the Nebraska Legislatures Judiciary Committee attended the meeting along with several representatives of the State Probation Office.

During the TBOC meetings a common theme has been the frustration from the audience as well as law enforcement due to what is perceived as sentences in court not being tough enough on criminals. Senator Dan Watermeier from Syracuse agreed, pointing out the overcrowding in prisons.

Senator Ebke said there are people going to prison, but overpopulation of Nebraska's 10 state prison facilities is an issue. She estimated over 100 people per month are sent to prison in Nebraska.

During the meeting it was revealed that the Nebraska prison population is more than 150 percent of capacity. Senator Ebke said if a lawsuit were to be filed and reach the federal court system, it could be a real problem, noting that in California the state was ordered to release prisoners due to overcrowding and some that were released were violent offenders which no one wants.

Senator Ebke said alternatives to prison time such as more probation for non-violent offenders create problems at the local level, creating issues for the County Sheriff's Departments, County Commissioners have to spend more money on jails and personnel. She said it then becomes more of a burden on the Probation Department.

It was also pointed out that it costs taxpayers approximately \$38-40-thousand annually to have someone in prison.

One thing that is being discussed for the District 1 Probation area that includes Richardson, Pawnee, Nemaha, Johnson, Otoe, Gage, Saline, Thayer, Fillmore and Jefferson counties is a Drug Court.

District Judge Julie Smith is reviewing the requirements. It would require approval from the Nebraska Supreme Court, and also approval and additional funding at the county level.

Many Signals Communications