

Judge orders population in Cambridge jail reduced to 230

By **Jeremy C. Fox** | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT JUNE 18, 2013

A Superior Court justice gave the Middlesex sheriff 30 days to reduce the number of pretrial detainees held in a Cambridge jail, where the population has at times topped 400, to just 230.

In a ruling Friday, Associate Justice Bruce R. Henry ordered Sheriff Peter J. Koutoujian to deliver a written proposal on inmate placement by June 20 and comply with the new cap by July 14. Henry raised the cap at the Cambridge facility from its limit of 200, which was imposed in 1989.

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The ruling was handed down after the American Civil Liberties Union of Massachusetts, in partnership with Prisoners' Legal Services of Massachusetts and two private attorneys, filed lawsuits challenging living conditions in the Cambridge jail.

Carol Rose, state ACLU executive director, called the ruling a human rights victory. "We think it's important that the courts acknowledge that it's not OK to hold people in unconstitutional conditions," Rose said Monday night. "If we as a country continue to lock up more people than any other country in the world, per capita, then we're going to have to pay a price."

The justice also increased the limits on detainees and prisoners at the Middlesex House of Correction in Billerica from 865 to 1,010.

Koutoujian plans to eventually relocate to Billerica all of the detainees from the jail, designed to hold 160 men, that occupies the top four floors of the 22-story former Middlesex County Edward J. Sullivan Courthouse in East Cambridge. He has said the jail is overcrowded and that its elevators, heat, and plumbing are unreliable. On Memorial Day, more than 400 detainees were relocated, many to Billerica, when a water pump failed.

Koutoujian said Monday that because many detainees remain in Billerica, only 236 reside in the Cambridge jail. He described the litigation as “a very cooperative process.”

“We all had the same goal,” he said. “We all knew that the Cambridge facility was overcrowded, and we were trying to ensure the safety of the inmates, of our corrections officers, and of the public.”

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