

**County to aid jailed mentally ill**  
**By Logan Carver**  
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Lubbock County took a step Monday to address mentally ill inmates' languishing in the county's criminal justice system.

County commissioners at Monday's scheduled meeting voted to contract with Lubbock Regional Mental Health Mental Retardation Center to provide mental health services at the Lubbock County Detention Center.

Contracting with MHMR would provide services for severely mentally ill inmates within the jail, including intervention, rehabilitation, competency restoration, and education.

The services are designed to reduce the amount of time mentally ill inmates remain behind bars, as well as the likelihood they will re-offend.

"It's clear this is the best approach to take with this to deal with these individuals while they're incarcerated," Sheriff Kelly Rowe said after presenting the proposal to commissioners.

Rowe called the move "a huge step," in working to meet the needs of these inmates and to help transfer them first from the Special Needs Unit to general population and then from jail to outpatient services with MHMR.

The program is based on existing successful programs in other areas and is primarily focused on in-house competency restoration, but also includes other programs the county isn't currently equipped to provide, Lubbock MHMR Chief Executive Officer Cathy Pope told the A-J earlier this month.

Monday's vote allocated money already in the sheriff's department budget to fund three mental health workers in the Special Needs Unit through Lubbock MHMR.

The program will cost about \$260,000 annually, but was structured monthly — at a cost of \$21,667 per month — and could be evaluated each month, Precinct 1 Commissioner Bill McCay said.

"It gives all of us an opportunity to assess accountability and to ensure success of the program," McCay said.

The contract would be effective Dec. 1, but officials agreed it would probably be at least Jan. 1 before the Special Needs Unit would be staffed with MHMR employees.

"We're more interested in a quality program than we are a hurry-up program," McCay said.