

Women's jail to be staffed by detention officers

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SANTA CRUZ — A minimum security jail for women opening Sept. 23 in two houses on Blaine Street will be staffed by detention officers, not probation department employees, Superior Court judges have decided.

In a letter to supervisors, Superior Court Judge Christopher Gottle stated, "... the Superior Court judges are of the view that it would be impractical, unfeasible and outside the scope of the functions of the Probation Department for that department to manage the minimum security jail facility."

In authorizing funds on Aug. 23 for the renovation of the houses, supervisors left it up to the judges to decide who should watch over the women prisoners.

The opening of the jail will mean minimum security women prisoners who have to be kept in maximum security lockup now will be able to be in a minimum security facility the same as their male counterparts at the Watsonville rehabilitation facility.

But it will also mean closure of the women's work furlough facility in Ben Lomond where low-risk female prisoners

can serve their time while going to school and jobs.

A work furlough program will be incorporated into the minimum security jail and probation employees will be able to come into the facility to work with prisoners in the program.

Probation employees who staff the women's work furlough facility on a 24-hour basis were lobbying to staff the minimum security jail, believing that would be the best way to continue their work with women in the work furlough program.

It would have been more costly to use probation employees at the jail rather than detention officers, according to figures compiled by the County Administrative Office.

Using detention officers would cost \$114,604 a year in salaries, while probation employees would cost \$123,917.

But Supervisors' Chairman Joe Cucchiara, in support of having probation employees run the facility, said the county shouldn't sacrifice the quality of the existing program in order to save dollars.