



Probation department finds new office space just before funding deadline

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After months of requests from District 12 Probation, the Cheyenne County commissioners found new office space for the probation branch in Sidney.

The Sidney office had outgrown its current space in the Cheyenne County courthouse building, and the county needed to utilize grant money meant for additional office space before it was required to return the funds to the state, in the middle of June.

County commissioner Ken McMillen was set with the task of seeking possible locations for office space after the commission's May 5 meeting, when time was running short.

"I think I come upon one that is reasonable and I hope it will fit your needs," McMillen told Linda Buehler, chief probation officer for District 12 at Monday's meeting. "It's not exactly what you wanted, but I feel that it's a lot better than what you have."

Currently in the Sidney office there are two full-time probation officers, one part-time officer, a data analyst and a clerical worker in a space with only three offices.

In addition to this, when officers in Scotts Bluff County perform pre-sentencing investigations by video with Cheyenne County clients to lighten the local workload, they must use one of those offices for this purpose.

The new office space at 11th Ave. and Illinois St. will feature five offices, including a small office for teleconferences as well as a reception area.

Although the space for the new offices isn't finished, the landlord estimates the offices will be ready by July 1.

As responsibility for underage offenders transitioned out of youth rehabilitation and treatment centers and is transferred from the Department of Health and Human Services to

the Office of Probation Administration, the burden of finding and paying for more office space for probation is placed on counties.

The bill responsible for this change, LB 561, was passed by the Nebraska Legislature last May. This bill and the associated legislation bring extensive reform to the juvenile justice system in an effort to expand services and allow alternatives to detention for youth in Nebraska, according to the Nebraska State **CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1A**

Bar Association. Although the state awarded grants to counties for the last two years to help with this transition, it will not award any more grant money for space after 2014.

The almost \$13,000 in grant money awarded to the county for additional probation space in 2013 must be spent by the end of June, or the county loses those funds. The county was awarded almost \$30,000 for 2014. Of that around \$16,000 will be allocated for office space and the rest would go to various youth causes and groups, including Cool Kids Club and Kids Plus.

Even though the board found office space, it must still ensure that this year's grant money is used before time runs out, McMillen stressed.

After the county signs a lease for the office space and pays for other associ-

ated moving costs, the grant money for this year will be gone, Buehler said.

The county must prove it's within 30 days of using the money by June 15, or the money must be returned to the Nebraska Crime Commission. Cheyenne County must also prove that it has used at least \$3,000 on juveniles in order to avoid paying the required match, which should be easy, Buehler said.

The commissioners voted to allow Cheyenne County attorney Paul Schaub to draft a lease agreement with the landlord to be accepted at the next commissioner meeting.

Under the original terms of the agreement, the county would pay \$700 a month for a three year lease.

District 12, which is based in Scotts Bluff, handles juvenile and adult probation cases for the entire Nebraska panhandle as well as Grant County.