

# Tribune Editorial: Utah can't escape responsibility for inmates it has farmed out to county jails

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Editorial  
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Prison inmates who are in the custody of the state of Utah are the responsibility of the state of Utah. The fact that they have been farmed out to one of the 21 county jails that make money by taking some pressure off the crowded state prison does not change that fact in the least.

So it should not have taken a scandal, a crackdown on one of the county jails involved and, now, an American Civil Liberties Union lawsuit to push the Utah Department of Corrections to take a lot more care in making sure those inmates aren't abused — or worse — when they are held elsewhere.

It isn't all bad. Some inmates, in some facilities, find themselves better off and better able to benefit from more education, rehab and detox programs. Garfield County has been held out as a good example of such programming.

But abuse of human beings is all too likely when they are trapped in a system that sees them as columns of debits and credits. Which is what happens when the state sends prisoners to county jails to relieve the cost of housing so many in expensive high-security prisons, while counties come to count on the revenue they receive to maintain their jails and other public services.

The most egregious example to have come to light is the sad case of Daggett County. State inmates held in that jail, we have discovered, were abused by jail guards. They were shocked with stun guns and had police dogs set upon them.

Complaints through the proper channels resulted in no action being taken to stop or punish the rogue guards. Only when the stories of abuse were routed through the hierarchy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and, through them, to the Department of Corrections and the Attorney General's Office, did anything happen. The state ended its deal with the Daggett County Jail. Criminal charges were filed against former Sheriff Jerry Jorgensen and four of his deputies. But only one guard went to jail — for four months. Jorgensen, charged only with misdemeanor official misconduct, paid \$500 in court costs and will have the charges dropped if he stays out of trouble for six months.

These penalties are far too lenient for people who have so abused their power and taken advantage of people who cannot leave, cannot fight back and are many miles removed from anyone who might help them. That's the idea behind the ACLU lawsuit, which names as defendants not only those who were charged in the criminal case but also the state, the county and a handful of other state and county officials and employees.

Whatever the outcome of that legal action, the state must step up its oversight of the county jails it uses to hold some 20 percent of its prisoners. Because, wherever they are, their continued welfare is the duty of the state.

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