

# Local

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## 'The system is broken'

Summit centers on improving women's jail



JOHN GREEN — Staff

**PASSING SOME TIME**, a female prisoner braids the hair of another inmate in the overcrowded women's jail in Redwood City. A Thursday summit addressed overcrowding and other concerns.

## Experts want focus on rehabilitation

By Kelly Pakula

STAFF WRITER

REDWOOD CITY — The county laid the initial groundwork for building a new women's jail during a five hour summit Thursday that drew 200 people and focused on how to improve services to the female inmate population.

The conference on women's correctional facilities at the Oracle Corp. Conference Center in Redwood City made it abundantly clear to most in attendance that the current correctional facility in Redwood City is woefully inadequate, incapable of offering the kind of services to reduce recidivism.

"Rather than warehousing people, we want to rehabilitate them," San Mateo County Supervisor Rose Jacobs Gibson said. "The only way we can improve public safety in our community is by improving the lives of these incarcerated individuals."



MATHEW SUMNER — Staff

**SHIRLEY LAMARR,**

Director of the Choices program, speaks at the San Mateo County Women's Criminal Justice Summit on Thursday in Redwood City.

Jacobs Gibson and other county officials said the county must offer rehabilitation services, such as job training and mental health services for women.

Incarcerated women have different needs from those of their male counterparts, as most of the women are victims of sexual abuse, addicted to drugs, are mothers and have no jobs.

"The one thing that we do know is that the system is broken," former state Sen. Jackie Speier said. "We talk rehabilitation, but we don't act rehabilitation. We have an opportunity in this county to truly change the way women are incarcerated."

But before the county can begin implementing new gender-based programs, its current women's jail, at 1590 Maple St. in Redwood City, will need to be rebuilt.

Please see **JAIL**, Local 6



# Call for new women's jail

► **JAIL**, from Local 1

Erected in 1980, the outdated dormitory-style jail was designed to hold 84 inmates, but its average daily population exceeds 140.

"Because of the actual layout of the women's facility, it doesn't lend itself to programming," County Supervisor Adrienne Tissier said.

"We, in fact, have women incarcerated in space that was never designed for living," Joan Petersilia, director of the Center for Evidence-Based Corrections at the University of California, Irvine, added. "This is not rocket science. We did this to ourselves."

Jacobs Gibson said she would like to see a new women's jail built in less than 10 years. It must include larger living quarters, as women sometimes are currently bunked three to a room and housed in classrooms and recreational spaces. The new jail will need a mental services ward, an expanded infirmary and a space where women can spend time with their children.

"If we're going to make a difference in San Mateo County, we need to be willing to take a risk and try something different," said Shirley Lamarr, director of the county's Choices program. "There are different needs for different people, and we understand that."

Complicating the issue is Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's proposal to transfer state inmates to local jails in the final year of their sentence, which could bring hundreds of ad-

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**Joan Petersilia**

DIRECTOR OF THE CENTER FOR  
EVIDENCE-BASED CORRECTIONS

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ditional inmates in need of rehabilitation to the county.

"We have to do a 180 and approach the criminal justice system and the corrections portion of it completely different," San Mateo County Chief Private Defender John Digiacinto said. "This huge, awkward ship called the corrections system will change directions."

But just how much will a new women's jail cost? That price tag, according to Jacobs Gibson, is still unknown. She said Thursday's summit was merely the first of many more discussions to come concerning the incarceration of women.

"I don't want to bring people together and have discussions and do nothing with it," Jacobs Gibson said. "This is the beginning and not the end."