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## District

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### Consultant Urges Cut In D.C. Jail Population

*Crowding Linked to Spike in Violence*

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The number of inmates held at the D.C. Jail should be reduced, according to a recent city-funded study that cites an increase in violence at the District's main detention center.

The 43-page consultants' analysis says there is "a distinct probability" that the District will have to build or acquire more jail capacity in the "near future" because the facility is legally obligated to house all individuals committed by the courts.

The consultants, Pulitzer/Bogard & Associates, which assessed the city's corrections system in 1997, also reported significant improvements at the detention center.

Among them: better sanitation and cleanliness, a renovated kitchen, replacement of the heating, ventilation and air-conditioning system that is near completion and implementation of a new computerized management information system.

But a jail watchdog group said

that the study shows a connection between a rise in the inmate population and a jump in the rate of assaults and fights at the facility.

"Although the report is a little fuzzy, it makes clear that the jail is grossly overcrowded and that these conditions are largely responsible for the upsurge in violence," said Philip Fornaci, executive director of the D.C. Prisoners' Legal Services Project.

The Lido Beach, N.Y., firm was hired to do the \$39,500 study after the D.C. Council became concerned about the mounting population and instances of violence at the jail in 2002 and 2003. Three inmates stabbed other inmates over a four-day period in December 2002, killing two pretrial detainees and wounding a third.

The council reached an agreement with the administration of Mayor Anthony A. Williams (D) to have an outside corrections consultant establish a cap for the facility.

The report says that the average daily population at the jail has ranged from 2,300 to 2,400 in-

mates since 2002.

"We recommend that the Operational Capacity range be established between 1,958 and 2,164 . . . plus or minus 5 percent," the study states. That range would reflect a population decrease of as little as 1.2 percent and as much as 22.5 percent.

The document stresses, however, that "the necessity for D.C. government to view this . . . study as one component of a comprehensive approach to determining current and future inmate capacity needs. . . . As such, this should not be viewed as a recommendation for a 'cap' as even at the high range of our recommended operational capacity, there is still a need to find new bed space for several hundred inmates."

"Practically speaking, this capacity range must be viewed with caution unless and until additional capacity can be found," the study says.

Furthermore, the report contends that the number of violent incidents at the detention center, particularly fights and assaults, is "very low" in relation to "what we would expect" for a large urban jail. But the document expressed concern that the rate of incidents per 100 inmates has increased with the higher population numbers at the facility.

Inmate-on-inmate assaults jumped by 16 percent from 2002 to 2003, fights increased 72 percent and assaults on staff soared 87 percent, according to the findings.

In June 2002, a federal judge lifted a court-ordered population cap of 1,674 inmates that had been in place at the jail for 17 years. The following year, the judge terminated a federal consent decree under which the jail had been operating for more than three decades with the goal of improving substandard conditions.

In a written statement, Odie Washington, the District's corrections director, said "it is important" that the consultants recognized improvements at the jail.

He also said that the agency concurs with the report's overall recommendations. Washington's statement noted that the consultants' population recommendations are intended as a long-term management plan for the jail and not an outright cap.

But Douglas R. Sparks, an attorney for the family of one of the inmates killed in December 2002, said Washington's position on the report conflicts with the legislation that mandated the study.

"The bill requires that the mayor now impose the number that the consultants arrived at as the maximum inmate population at the jail," Sparks said.