



## The Birmingham News

### Homewood eyes inmate care deal

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**KIM BRYAN**  
News staff writer

Homewood police officers may have more time to patrol the streets if the city agrees on a proposal to hire a company to treat sick jail inmates.

Officers now interrupt duties to drive inmates to Cooper Green Mercy Hospital, wait there until they are examined, and usually drive them back to jail. Most are not admitted.

The City Council is expected to vote tonight on a proposal to enter a contract with a medical services company that would send health care professionals to the jail to treat inmates. The council meets at 6 at City Hall.

Quality Correctional Health Care Inc. was the low bidder at \$41,592 a year, said Councilman Allan Trippe. If approved, the plan could start as early as June 15.

The cost for the rest of fiscal 2008, ending Sept. 30, would be just under \$12,000.

Council approval is required before entering into a contract. Details of the agreement, such as number of visits per week, are not set, police officials said.

Dr. Johnny Bates, who practiced internal medicine in Hamilton for 20 years, started the correctional health care company three years ago. His first client was Colbert County Jail. In April 2007, he entered a contract with Montgomery County Jail.

Bates said inmate off-site visits at Montgomery County have since been reduced by 95 percent.

Tax dollars are spent on inmate medical care needlessly, Bates said.

"Correctional officers are trained to do security," he said. "We are trained to practice medicine.

"If you do a good job of taking care of inmates at the jail, the savings are enormous," Bates said.

E-mail: [kbryan@bhamnews.com](mailto:kbryan@bhamnews.com)

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