

'NOWHERE ELSE TO GO'

IS JAIL A SHELTER OF LAST RESORT?

Homeless inmates are chronic case

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Cincinnati's homeless take up more space in the Hamilton County jail – with the average homeless inmate spending more time in jail than in homeless shelters.

At \$65 a night, jailing homeless suspects cost taxpayers as much as \$3 million a year.

Those numbers are leading city and county leaders to question whether the increasingly overcrowded jail has become the homeless shelter of last resort.

On a typical day, at least six homeless people are arrested and booked into the jail, according to an Enquirer analysis of jail data. That's 5 percent of the people arrested – a number that has doubled over the past decade, even as the jail space crisis mounted.

The analysis shows that despite committing relatively minor crimes – most often drinking in public and disorderly conduct – homeless people typically stay in jail three to four days longer than those who aren't homeless.

Even after Sheriff Simon L. Leis Jr. closed the Queensgate jail because of budget cuts in December, the jailed homeless population has barely dropped.

"It's always been a problem as long as I've been around," Leis said. "We've become the facility that handles people with mental problems or the homeless, people with nowhere else to go."

Hamilton County's biggest consumers of county jail space are overwhelmingly homeless: Of the 10 most frequently arrested men in Hamilton County over the last decade, eight were homeless most of the time. A ninth has been in and out of homeless shelters.

Despite most often being ac-

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Cincinnati Police Sgt. Steve Saunders talks with Christopher Newcomb and another man at a homeless camp. Saunders works to keep a relationship with the homeless population.



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Jesse Shadrick, 42, enters a courtroom. The homeless man has been arrested more than 50 times. Jailing homeless suspects cost taxpayers as much as \$3 million a year.



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Bennie Crabtree, pictured at Our Daily Bread in Over-the-Rhine, has been arrested hundreds of times, officials say.

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