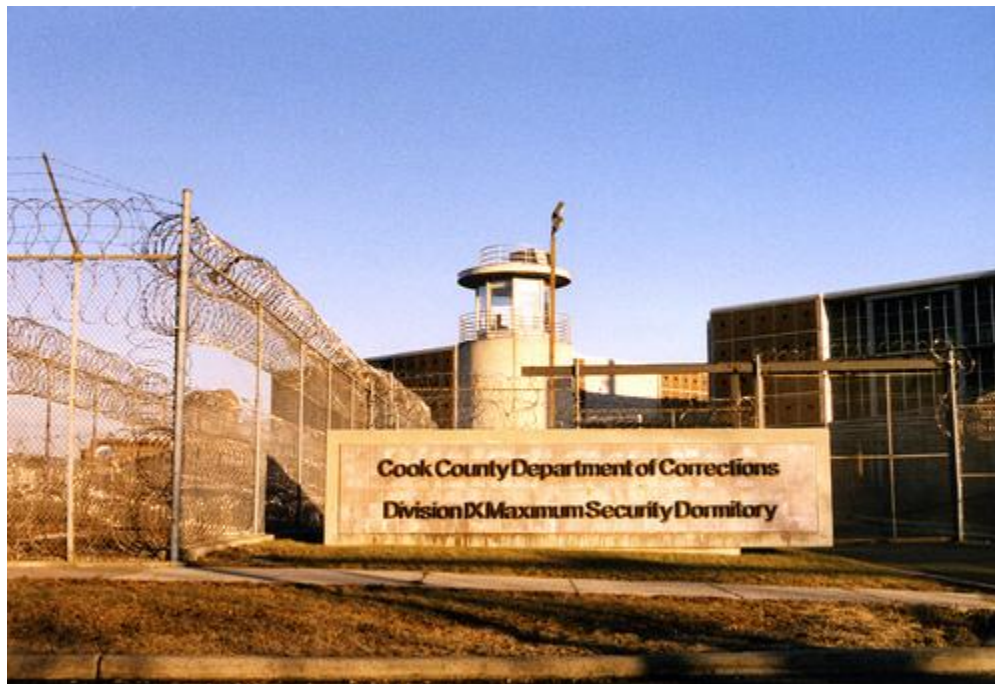




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The county houses state parole violators in its jail, but the state hasn't been paying its share of the cost.

Cook County may take the state to court over unpaid jail bills

by [Alex Keefe](#)

Jan 14, 2009

Cook County is threatening to take the state to court to get money it is owed for housing state prisoners in its jail.

The county holds 1,600 prisoners every day for parole violations, and the state is supposed to pay half the cost, but hasn't since 2005.

So the Cook County Board Tuesday directed the county state's attorney to look into filing a claim against the state to get its money.

Commissioner Peter Silvestri (R-Chicago), who sponsored the resolution, said the state Department of Corrections has been refusing to pay for more than three years, despite repeated requests from the county sheriff's office, which manages the jail.

Silvestri said he knows the state is dealing with its own budget woes, but that doesn't give it carte blanche to shirk its statutory obligations.

"The other alternative is to put [the prisoners] in buses and drive them to Joliet and drop them off," Silvestri said, adding "maybe we need to put them on buses and take them to Springfield."

A representative for the Illinois Department of Corrections did not return a phone call seeking

comment.

Tuesday's resolution does not give the county state's attorney a deadline, but that may not matter. Silvestri said he expects the issue will be settled before it gets to court.

Even if that happens, it may be a while before Cook County gets its check.

According to a recent report released by the Illinois comptroller's office, the state has more than \$1.8 billion in unpaid bills sitting on its desk, and the backlog for paying them is historically long.

In addition, state law stipulates that a number of other bills be paid before the county can collect its money, such as welfare checks, bond repayments and state workers' paychecks, said Charlie Wheeler, director of the Public Affairs Program at the University of Illinois at Springfield.

"Cook County's not going to get shut down if it doesn't get the payment, so they're going to get put to the end of the line," Wheeler said.

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