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Bexar County to Federal Government: County jail doesn't have room for federal detainees

SAN ANTONIO - Hundreds of detainees are housed at the Central Detention Facility in downtown San Antonio. A sign in front may say GEO Group but that's not who owns the building. The county does. GEO is a private company that runs the jail in the 200 block of Laredo Street for the federal government. The county says the arrangement doesn't make financial sense anymore. "This was going to be problematic for Bexar County taxpayers," Bexar County Sheriff Javier Salazar said. It's why County Commissioners passed a resolution Tuesday to start the process of ending that contract with GEO. The county has been working to ensure that the University of Texas in San Antonio has the room to expand in the downtown area. Another resolution passed in October of 2018 shows just that. But the detention facility is in the way. Sheriff Salazar said a deal was made several years ago, saying that when this transition began, those federal detainees would be moved into the county jail. That deal was made when the county jail had more room but now Salazar said they are maxed out at an average of 4200 inmates. "In doing the math and knowing 'OK, that was done when the jail population was down' (but) here now that it is up, here what is it going to cost me now? I'm going to lose bed space," Salazar said. Had the detainees been moved to the county jail, Sheriff Salazar said some of the current county inmates would have needed to be sent to other jails outside the county and the building itself would have needed to be reconstructed. "It would've been about \$10 million for construction cost plus about \$10 million a year to house out those inmates elsewhere," Salazar said. The question now remains. Where will the federal detainees be held? "I don't mind helping find the solution, I can't be the solution though," Salazar said. The federal government said it is working to find placement for the detainees. It is still unclear when the contract between the county and GEO expires but the county says it has time to figure it all out.