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Rural Communities Look to Jails for Revenue.

A new report found that rural areas are increasingly renting out jail beds to places with overcrowded facilities in an effort to bring in more revenue.

The jail population in the U.S. has been steadily falling over the past decade. Much of that decline has been driven by cities, like New Orleans, which shrunk the jail population to the lowest numbers since 1979, and New York, where the jail now holds almost 70% fewer people than it did in the 1990s.

But jail capacity hasn't seen the same shift. Instead, rural communities, as well as some suburban localities and mid-sized cities, are often choosing to build new jails or additions. Overall jail capacity grew by over 11% between 2005 and 2013, according to a new report from the Vera Institute of Justice, a nonprofit that advocates for changes to the criminal justice system.

"Across the country, you see a really interesting trend," said Chris Mai, one of the report's authors. "While the number of people in jail is going down, capacity is going up. Small towns and rural America just keep adding more jail beds."

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Route Fifty

By Emma Coleman

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