New law expected to generate $50,000

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A recently enacted law that went into effect here Monday is expected to generate more than $50,000 a year for the East Baton Rouge Parish Sheriff's Office salary fund, officials in the sheriff's office estimate.

The law, Act 380 of the 1985 Legislature, authorizes sheriffs to collect $7 for each appearance bond it writes.

That, according to Capt. Brent Bonnette in the criminal division business office, could amount to approximately $53,000 a year for the salary fund, based on an average of 7,600 bonds written annually.

Although judges set the amount of a bond, the sheriff's office personnel must write out the bond that appears in a defendant's criminal record file and guarantees his appearance in court.

In District Court, the Bail Bond Project works as the middleman between the judges and the sheriff's office. Bail Bond Project workers, per a judge's request, fill out an order fixing an appearance bond showing who the judge has authorized to sign the bond, as well as other restrictions and orders.

After the bond is fixed, the order is sent to the sheriff's office, where the official bond is written and the person is released from incarceration under the terms of the bond.

Bonds included in the new fee structure include all misdemeanor summonses, recognizance bonds, property bonds, bonds on which a bail bondsman guarantees the defendant's appearance in court, family court bonds, fugitive bonds and all regular appearance bonds.

According to Bucky Rives, executive director of the Louisiana Sheriff's Association, the association pushed for enactment of the law.

"We're forced to find alternative financing solutions for our sheriff's offices," Rives said. He said the fees generated by the new law will help in that respect.

Rives pointed out that throughout the state, sheriff's offices are facing decreasing revenues.

"We can't get millages passed, we're losing federal revenue-sharing funds, the state has cut our supplemental salaries for deputies, and, really, the financing for the sheriff's operation is just deteriorating," Rives said.