



Modernizing Justice to Support and Promote Recovery

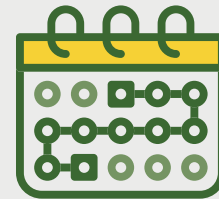
What is driving the need to change how our justice system operates?

The Legislature should commission the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) to conduct a study of the county jail system. Counties face many obstacles in successfully operating, maintaining, and providing services, like physical and behavioral health (BH), in their jails. Furthermore, recommendations from the Jail Standards Task Force and sentencing modifications from groups like the Criminal Sentencing Task Force will undoubtedly impose new obligations and requirements upon counties that will result in an increased county fiscal impact. Gathering all jail system-related data, impacts, and costs, analyzing them, and publishing a list of recommendations therefrom will establish a baseline from which all levels of government can work to take steps toward improving the current system.

OUR REQUEST:



Commission WSIPP to conduct a study on county justice system costs.



Due to state hospital backlog, individuals with BH needs are spending weeks and months in county jails.

What is WSAC's goal?

WSAC's goal is for the Legislature to commission WSIPP, with WSAC's assistance to obtain county-level data, to gather and assess foundational information about the changes in jail populations and the current state and costs of jail facilities and produce a report on its findings. This report would provide a basis from which a task force could subsequently be commissioned by the Legislature to review the findings of the report and develop recommendations for a statewide jail modernization plan. The hope is that the groundwork completed by WSIPP in its study will help inform a more robust discussion about all the many complications facing jail modernization.



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What impacts the county justice system?

- 1 The age of county jails plays a notable role in the need for facility upgrades and improvements. Most county jails were constructed in the 1980s, with several being built in the early 1900s. Aging facilities have led to years of patchwork fixes for things like roofs, HVAC systems, boilers, security systems, and additional capacity. An increased emphasis on needs for physical and BH has similarly led to a demand for sufficient and/or modernized facilities.
- 2 County jails have become the de facto facilities for housing those suffering from BH problems and providing their treatment. Due to state hospital backlog, individuals with BH needs are spending weeks and months in county jails rather than getting the specialized attention and treatment they need at BH facilities. Counties have had to make modifications to their facilities by, for example, turning single-bed cells into double and triple-bed cells to accommodate those with BH needs. This has created serious capacity issues, leading to severe overcrowding and understaffing.
- 3 Counties anticipate an immediate need for either extensive facility remodels or new jail facilities. The statewide estimate for facility remodels is well over \$300 million and new facility builds are almost \$2 billion. For many, the existing jail configuration and footprint preclude any meaningful and permanent answers to space-related issues – meaning the only real solution is to build a new jail. Counties cannot afford this due, in part, to the State’s constitutional limit to tax property at 1% annually. This severely impacts a county’s ability to increase revenue for large projects.
- 4 The Jail Standards Task Force is in the process of gathering and reviewing data on jails in Washington and across the United States. It will then make recommendations to the Legislature regarding state oversight of jails and other policy changes to promote the safety and welfare of incarcerated persons and staff. These recommendations, due July 2023, will no doubt propose legislation that imposes additional standards for jails – resulting in a greater fiscal impact on counties without additional funding.



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There are 64% more individuals with BH needs waiting for eligible beds than before Trueblood was decided.