

### Building and Financing Jails in Tennessee



Several counties have decided to build, enlarge, or renovate their jails to reduce their exposure to increased risk of litigation and enhanced liability. These counties, however, have used various approaches to construction and financing, resulting in very different bed costs and subsequent operating costs.

This report examines how counties have handled jail construction projects, from financing, to planning and design, to actual construction. Technical assistance for jail construction projects is available from several sources, including the state's jail oversight agency, Tennessee Corrections Institute (TCI). The Office of Research surveyed county sheriffs in Tennessee to determine, among other things, whether counties used available technical assistance, and from what source(s). Counties that have constructed jails in the past three years also reported on their choice of architects, project oversight before and during construction, and project financing. The report looks at inefficiencies that may arise from conflicting state and national jail construction standards, or counties that choose not to spend what is necessary to meet long-term needs.

#### **Report Findings:**

- Counties have funded jail projects that will not meet long-term needs
- Some counties do not seek technical assistance when constructing jails
- Rules require counties to submit plans to TCI and the State Fire Marshall, but specify neither the elements required nor when counties should submit them
- Some TCI construction standards differ from court-tested ACA standards, often used by architects designing jails
- No Tennessee counties have chosen to operate a jail jointly, although state law permits it

**Other states require specific actions and documents at defined steps during jail construction – Tennessee's does not.**

#### **Recommendations:**

- The General Assembly may wish to consider restructuring TCI's Board, with expertise in areas such as jail construction and operation, architecture, and engineering
- The General Assembly may wish to consider creating financial incentives for counties to establish regional jails
- TCI should amend its rules to specify the documents counties should submit, establishing an organized system of plan review and approval
- TCI should hire staff contract for expertise in architecture and engineering
- Some Tennessee counties should consider the feasibility of establishing regional jails

**View the full report at <http://www.comptroller.state.tn.us/cpdivorea.htm>**

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