



Legislation Text

File #: 23-1796, **Version:** 1

Department: County Administration

Department Head/Elected Official: David Berry, County Administrator and Ed Gonzalez, Sheriff

Regular or Supplemental RCA: Supplemental RCA

Type of Request: Discussion Item

Project ID (if applicable): N/A

Vendor/Entity Legal Name (if applicable): N/A

MWDBE Contracted Goal (if applicable): N/A

MWDBE Current Participation (if applicable): N/A

Justification for 0% MWDBE Participation Goal: N/A - Goal not applicable to request

Request Summary (Agenda Caption):

Request by the Harris County Sheriff's Office and Office of County Administration for discussion and possible action on jail operations, health, safety, and staff retention.

Background and Discussion:

On February 21, 2023, Commissioners Court requested that the Harris County Sheriff's Office (HCSO) work with the Office of County Administration (OCA) to provide an update on the jail and recommendations for additional initiatives and investments.

Managing the overall jail population requires the cooperation and partnership of agencies across the criminal justice system. The below recommendations focus on areas where HCSO and Commissioners Court can make additional investments with a high potential for success.

After meeting, HCSO and OCA identified four key objectives and associated initiatives:

- 1. Improving recruitment, retention, and training for detention staff.** Over the last four years, Commissioners Court has added approximately 600 new positions in Department 541- Sheriff Detention. However, employee turnover continues to be very high, which is costly and, because employees must undergo six months of training, this reduces the effective number of staff available to perform supervisory duties. Currently 67% of detention officer resignations occur within the first two years.

Over the longer run, but beginning in the fiscal year 2023-24 budget, it is vital to increase the pay scale for detention officers, alongside other county employees. Each 1% raise for all detention staff would cost \$1.2M on an annualized basis; a 4% raise would cost \$4.9M. HCSO also seeks to continue to develop a civilian detention career path.

Over the shorter term, HCSO and OCA have developed a retention incentive plan for detention officer staff for Commissioners Court to consider. Each DO would receive a \$2,000 retention incentive upon completing 12 months of service, which corresponds to receipt of state jail certification. Each DO would then receive a \$1,000 retention incentive after each additional six months of service. The program would be evaluated after 12 months and would terminate at the end of 24 months. The hope is that by that time, more competitive salaries could be funded. The overall cost of the retention program is estimated at \$3.4M annually, depending on attrition rates.

HCSO is requesting to create a classification for detention captain at a starting salary of \$44.83/hour and create two new detention captain positions at an estimated cost of \$265K annually, in furtherance of the civilian career path at the jail.

In addition, HCSO is requesting an FMLA Coordinator that would create a structure around FMLA leave and increase accountability and transparency in the use of this leave.

HCSO would also like to engage with an outside expert who can advise the department on best practices for hiring and retaining DOs and to help implement a plan for improvement. An outside expert would look at HCSOs overall hiring processes, from advertisements all the way through onboarding, with the goal of improving recruiting and retention.

2. **Improving coordination with Harris Health for jail medical services.** HCSO and Harris Health leadership now have regular executive meetings to review jail healthcare. HCSO has requested that Harris Health provide regular staffing and performance reports. It is recommended that these reports be included in the jail medical contract for fiscal year 2023-24. HCSO has identified a need for another senior position to manage the Harris Health contract. This Director of Healthcare Quality Assurance would oversee the Harris Health contract on behalf of HCSO and aggressively troubleshoot issues as they arise.
3. **Assist partner agencies in safely reducing the jail population.** HCSO has very limited influence on the jail population. However, HCSO has keen insight into the inmate population. There are a significant number of inmates who are homeless, charged with lower-level offenses, or have low bonds, who are candidates for safe release. HCSO and OCA propose adding five jail population specialists to the detention staff. These specialists would work with Pretrial Services, the District Courts, the DA's Office, and others to identify candidates for safe release. These specialists would be able to work inside the jail on a regular basis to gather more information about safe release candidates. While we would not expect a quick, massive change in the jail population, relatively small decreases can still improve operations and safety.
4. **Improve jail infrastructure and technology.** HCSO is engaged with Harris County Engineering on a facilities review, and looks forward to working toward more modern, humane, safer detention facilities. The Women's Empowerment Center ("Little Baker") was recently completed and can house up to 526 female inmates with improved access to support services and programming. HCSO is currently working with Universal Services to add and replace 1,800 cameras at 1200 Baker Street, and as well as enhance radio coverage in the detention complex.

Harris County recently purchased more modern, standardized body cameras for HCSO patrol staff and seven Constable agencies. Expansion to all detention staff would be an estimated annualized cost of \$3.02M. This requires approval of contract amendment.

Based on the above discussion, below is a summary of actions for Commissioners Court to consider:

- Refer the 24-month Detention Officer Retention Incentive Program to the ARPA SteerCo to return to Commissioners Court for approval.
- Approve an amendment to the County's body worn camera contract for HCSO detention staff.
- Direct the Human Resources & Risk Management and the Office of Management and Budget to create a new Detention Captain classification and fund two positions at an estimated cost of \$265K/annually; five jail population specialists (administrative coordinator classification) at an estimated cost of \$550k annually; a Director of Healthcare Quality Assurance, and a FMLA Coordinator at a competitive salary to-be-determined by HRRM working with HCSO.
- Direct the Purchasing Agent to work with the HCSO to retain a Third-Party expert to review the office's HR practices regarding recruiting for detention staff and implement recommendations for improvement.

Expected Impact:

Improve health, safety and operations at the Harris County jail.

Alternative Options: Do not fund these initiatives or delay them until the fiscal year 2023-24 budget

Alignment with Goal(s):

- ☒ Justice and Safety
- ☐ Economic Opportunity
- ☐ Housing
- ☐ Public Health
- ☐ Transportation
- ☐ Flooding
- ☐ Environment
- ☐ Governance and Customer Service

Prior Court Action (if any):

Date	Agenda Item #	Action Taken

Location:

Address (if applicable):

Precinct(s): Countywide

Fiscal and Personnel Summary			
Service Name			
	FY 23	FY 24	Next 3 FYs
Incremental Expenditures (do NOT write values in thousands or millions)			
Labor Expenditures	\$368,078	\$815,000	\$2,445,000
Non-Labor Expenditures	\$6,502,138	\$6,502,138	\$12,550,138
Total Incremental Expenditures	\$6,870,216	\$7,317,138	\$14,995,138
Funding Sources (do NOT write values in thousands or millions)			
Existing Budget			
Choose an item.	\$	\$	\$
Choose an item.	\$	\$	\$
Choose an item.	\$	\$	\$
Total Current Budget	\$	\$	\$
Additional Budget Requested			
2651 - American Rescue Plan 2021	\$3,478,138	\$3,478,138	\$3,478,138
Other	\$3,024,000	\$3,024,000	\$9,072,000
1000 - General Fund	\$368,078	\$815,000	\$2,445,000
Total Additional Budget Requested	\$6,870,216	\$7,317,138	\$14,995,138
Total Funding Sources	\$6,870,216	\$7,317,138	\$14,995,138
Personnel (Fill out section only if requesting new PCNs)			
Current Position Count for Service	2,686	-	-
Additional Positions Requested	9	-	-
Total Personnel	2,695	-	-

Anticipated Court Date: March 14, 2023

Anticipated Implementation Date (if different from Court date): TBD

Emergency/Disaster Recovery Note: Not an emergency, disaster, or COVID-19 related item

Contact(s) name, title, department: David Berry, County Administrator and Ed Gonzalez, Sheriff

Attachments (if applicable): N/A