

“County Jails: Financial and Operational Challenges”

Ohio Revised Code 341.05 (A)

Requires that the Sheriff assign sufficient staff to **ensure the safe and secure operation of the county jail**, but staff shall be assigned only to the extent such staff can be provided with funds appropriated to the Sheriff at the discretion of the board of county commissioners

Budgeting

In comparison to other county general fund budgeted offices historically the Sheriff has received a larger percent of the total overall general fund budget allowing for the Sheriff to maintain the operations of the local jail while providing the community an assurance of safety and security.

Why a larger percent?

7 days a week, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year operation

Staffing Cost – (Wages, Benefits, Training, Outfitting, Contractual Language of Collective Bargaining)

Physical Plant – Utilities (Natural Gas, Water, Electric, Sewer, Telephone/Electronic Data i.e. internet and web access) building upkeep (External/internal), equipment upkeep etc.

Protection of Inmates Civil Rights and lessening Liabilities in being responsible for Human Life – Increased filing of Federal Civil Lawsuits

Contracts – Increased Food, Medical and Mental Health Services, etc.

Operational expenses through an increased need of electronic, computerized data driven items

Over the course of the past several years local general fund budgets have continued to diminish large in part by a diminishing economy, increases in unemployment, decreases in local government funding, population growth and downturn as well as the overall effects brought on by lagging sales tax returns from decreased retail sales.

Through the economic downturn Ohio counties have had to adjust general fund budgeting passing those adjustments to the county sheriff. County Sheriff's have in turn had to cut services, initiate employee layoffs thus decreasing overall staffing levels below safety driven norms while decreasing or freezing employee wages and benefits.

Some counties have elected to reach out to the local tax payer by placing sale taxes increases to a vote. Some of those counties have elected to designate sales tax increases specific to funding criminal justice thus reducing financial pressure on the remaining decreased general fund.

As we face a state budget deficit of over 8 billion dollars additional decreases in local government funding are only inevitable thus requiring the local tax payer the burden of increased tax in an already sluggish economy. This in turn could greatly affect the ability of the local sheriff to provide for the services that tax payers expect while greatly lessening the assurance of safety and security.

Medical Care Cost

Over the past several decades Ohio Sheriff's have continued to experience increase in inmate medical care cost. Those costs have been attributed to several varying factors:

Inmate unemployment status and lack of health insurance benefits

Increased cost of medication and the providing of health care

Increase seriousness of illnesses (cancer, kidney dialysis, significant heart issues, diabetes, Hepatitis A, B, C, AIDS and HIV, tuberculosis, etc.)

Lack of appropriate follow up care and/or the following of health care instructions by physician at the time of diagnosis to include self administering medication. Lack of wellness check up's, etc.

Alcohol, Drug Abuse and Non-prescription drug abuse

Although Ohio Sheriff's have continued to explore how to lessen budgetary dollars dedicated to inmate medical cost, their attempts are continually challenged.

Means of savings thus far have included inmate co-pay medical for health care intervention provided by the facility doctor or nurses and prescribed medications, utilization of health care contracts with inclusive services often gleaning greater buying power by the contracting company thus increased savings for the county, central pharmacy purchasing, HB66 savings for medical service providers who are not under contract with the county i.e. emergency room visits, specialized follow up treatment by a specialized doctor, providing services to the county.

Mental Health Care and Mental Health Care Cost

Similar to medical care cost Ohio Sheriff's continue to experience increased incarcerations of those persons who have been diagnosed with varying degrees of mental health illness. Along with the incarcerations comes a cost for the varying types of mental health medications to include Psychotropic's.

During the past decade those becoming incarcerated who have been diagnosed with mental health illness have continued to increase. With decreased funding sources, lessening of available inpatient mental health beds, closure of state run mental health institutions and decreases in funding for outpatient services today's mentally ill are facing day to day life throughout Ohio communities with less support services than in past decades.

Ohio Sheriff's are faced with the responsibility of treating those who become incarcerated, providing mental health services and the appropriate medications to assist in maintaining the mental health offenders well being. However, over time the Ohio Sheriff's have found themselves backed against a wall forced to incarcerate those individuals who exhibit signs of serious mental health illness and who are unable to be controlled behaviorally or through appropriate medication.

Clearly these types of mental health individuals need to be appropriately assessed and evaluated by mental health professionals. Often this individual is treated through an inpatient mental health service provider such as the state hospital of the past. Unfortunately more often today the Ohio Sheriff's are faced with these types of individuals being turned away from the inpatient setting due to lack of available bed space and/or the belief that the individual is safer in a jail and can be treated in the local setting.

Ohio Sheriff's have responded by increasing training for staff in mental health illness and are having officers complete 40 hours of Crisis Intervention Training. Additionally Sheriff's are forging collaborative efforts with local ADAMHS boards and local mental health providers. This however does not provide the cure all. Ohio Sheriff's continue to be faced with the costly housing of mentally ill offenders and the lessening of outpatient resources.

Unfunded Mandates – Changes in Law

Financially and operationally Ohio Sheriff's continue to be faced with unfunded mandates or changes in Ohio law which require additional man hours, changes in operational procedure and training from within the jail that are not economically supported and require local general fund financing.

A couple of examples of pending items include a federally driven protocol in properly handling, documenting and reporting sexual assaults, acts, harassment, etc. within a jail setting. This is known as the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA). When enacted in the coming year Ohio Sheriff's will be faced with compliance costs in the upwards of hundreds of thousands to millions of dollars in cost in meeting PREA guidelines.

SB 22, Justice Reinvestment Act and the potential sentencing change for Ohio's non violent F4 and F5 offenders potentially adding to the Ohio Sheriff's already overcrowded local jail population. The Ohio Sheriff has an understanding of the issues faced by the State of Ohio regarding prison overcrowding however continue to show expressed concern about potential after effects that could be similar to that of SB2 in 1996.

Additional DNA collection under HB77 for specified offenders during the intake process at the jail immediately following arrest.

Overcrowding

Ohio Sheriff's continue to be faced with jails that are running at either one hundred (100) percent of their rated capacity or greater. In 2008 the annual report published by the Bureau of Adult Detention reported that Ohio's primary jails held an average population of 20,706 prisoners. It was further noted that the Full Service Jail Classification primarily the jail classification overseen by Ohio Sheriff's was at 111 % over capacity. Populations have only continued to rise in the past two years.