



## FAQs on Future of Camden County Jail

**Q: Why is Camden County exploring alternatives to the county jail, new ways of processing inmates, alternatives to incarceration and building a new jail?**

**A:** There are several compelling reasons:

- The jail is overcrowded and any model for the future will provide relief to the physical plant overcrowding.
- The jail is consistently overcrowded, averaging 1,650 inmates. The maximum number deemed acceptable is 1,250. The County's plan would reduce the maximum capacity to 1,000 and has hired a nationally recognized consultant to work with criminal justice and jail staff to achieve this change.
- Because of overcrowding and conditions in the jail, the County is the defendant in a federal lawsuit.
- Because the jail is overcrowded, 3 to 4 inmates sleep in a cell built for only 1 or 2.
- The overcrowding makes repairs difficult and cumbersome because there is no room to move the inmates while making the repairs.
- Overcrowding has led to increased health risks among inmates.
- Current conditions adversely affect Camden County's taxpayers because of the potential for additional lawsuits.

**Q: Is repairing and expanding the jail a viable option?**

**A:** It is a poor option, at best. The jail is not designed to facilitate those kinds of changes. It would require higher staffing levels and pose safety problems for both guards and inmates. Direct supervision at all times would be difficult if not impossible. Moreover, structural and infrastructure repairs—from replacing all the windows to remodeling the bathrooms – would cost \$50 million. Even with repairs, the design flaws would remain the same at a facility that was designed 30 years ago. Corrections policies and standards have changed dramatically since then, making this jail inadequate to meet today's demands and challenges.

**Q: If a new jail needs to be built, why wouldn't the County build it?**

**A:** The cost to the County to build a new jail to house the existing number of inmates would be prohibitive, ranging from \$300 to \$400 million. Even as a capital expense, this would add \$30-40 million in debt service to the budget. It would be an unfair and unacceptable burden to the taxpayers.

**Q: What is the current cost of running the jail?**

**A:** Current operating costs are around \$60 million annually, roughly 20 percent of the entire County budget.

**Q: Is privatization the entire solution to the overcrowding and other problems at the jail?**

**A:** No. It is a key component of a strategy that includes following the recommendations necessary to improve conditions in the jail as identified in reports produced by outside consultants Pulitzer & Bogard Associates, LLC, as well as the work of the current county advisory committee addressing overcrowding. Although one report was commissioned by plaintiffs' counsel in the recent lawsuit brought against the County regarding the conditions at the jail, the County embraces the issue and has contracted with consultant Marie Van Nostrand, PhD, a nationally-known expert on criminal justice and alternatives to incarceration, to work with the prosecutor's office and the courts to safely and appropriately reduce the inmate population through a combination of streamlined processing of cases and alternatives to incarceration.

**Q: Why look at privatization or a hybrid that has elements privatized?**

**A:** Privatization has worked in other parts of the country—in states such as Michigan and Tennessee – and has also had regional success in places like Essex County and Trenton, as well as in Delaware County, Pennsylvania. Generally, these jails have saved taxpayers millions of dollars and provided higher-quality physical plants and programs.

Several companies specialize in running these institutions. Generally, they construct state-of-the-art buildings, with room and programs for treatment and job training that can reduce recidivism, thereby reducing prison population and costs.

State-of-the-art design—usually a single floor in a rectangular configuration with excellent sight lines—would require less staffing and/or overtime and would be less stressful for inmates and corrections officers.

**Q: How would this work?**

**A:** The County would use a competitive bidding process to select a vendor to construct and operate the jail for Camden County, detailing all aspects of expected operations, performance criteria, and key contractual terms, including those related to the role of unions, eligibility of current employees for future jobs under a contract, and the impact on wages, benefits and seniority. The specs

would be written with the highest level of public safety in mind, with input from top law enforcement officials, from the warden to the county sheriff and police chiefs, as well as the Director of Public Safety. An advisory board made up of county mayors and police chiefs would be involved in planning the facility and the warden and others would be involved in county oversight of the facility. Any plan would have to be approved by the state Department of Corrections and meet its standards for safety.

The County would evaluate the proposals, investigate the track records of potential vendors, and enter into negotiations with the selected firms. Payment would be on a per diem per inmate basis. The per diem would include the cost of the private company constructing the building and operating the jail. The County would choose the company from those submitting RFPs.

**Q: Why are treatment and training centers an important part of building a new facility?**

**A:** Research shows that many inmates are repeat offenders who have drug or alcohol abuse problems. Without appropriate treatment, those inmates use the jail as a revolving door hotel of sorts. The problem of recidivism is being faced across the country. Part of the solution to the high incarceration rate in this country—and its high cost to taxpayers—is curing inmates of their addictions and providing them with training that will result in new productive jobs and careers.

**Q: Is staff well-trained at private facilities?**

**A:** They are. All are trained in law enforcement procedures in an approved training program and have the same law enforcement powers within the jail as PBA corrections officers. The NJ state Department of Corrections would approve and regulate any plan the County proposed, including training of staff. In addition, law enforcement officials at the highest levels would be involved in setting standards and criteria and the Camden County Warden would supervise the running of the jail, as a watchdog for the County.

**Q: If the jail is privatized, would current staff lose their jobs?**

**A:** No. The staff have the option of reapplying for their jobs, and in most instances they will be rehired by the private firm. As part of this plan, the County would conduct discussions with unionized employees about the impact of the decision to privatize, what their membership's needs would be, and what protections they would want to see in place, as recommended in the Detention Alternatives study conducted by Pulitzer/Bogard.

**Q: What will happen to their pensions and other benefits?**

**A:** The County will do everything to ensure an equitable transition for these employees. Pay scales for private firms can be comparable to public ranges. An added advantage is that these companies are regional or national, offering a wider range of promotion opportunities for employees. Their health benefits are comparable and they provide 401ks. Many privatized facilities have unions.

**Q: What happens if the company that runs the jail goes out of business?**

**A:** This and other contingencies will be dealt with in the procurement process. Other states have responded well when faced with this situation. For example, the Delaware County jail in Pennsylvania was run by a private company that no longer wanted to be in the business of running a county jail. A competitive process selected a new firm which has been in place and is meeting Delaware County's expectations

**Q: Will privatization save taxpayers money?**

**A:** Yes. At a minimum, we believe this change would show a net savings of \$5 million a year, with the possibility of \$10-15 million in savings, depending on per diem costs and other factors. The privatized jail would be a tax ratable for the city of Camden and a potential local employer.

Additionally, the County would be providing a state-of-the-art jail that would meet all public standards and legal mandates, thus avoiding more lawsuits, which translates into savings for taxpayers. The facility should also help decrease recidivism through treatment and training programs, resulting in more future savings for the County.

**Q: Where would the jail go?**

**A:** A facility will not be located in any community that does not want it. The Freeholder Board will not attempt to impose a facility on any community. The final decision will be made by the residents and officials in the community under consideration. The decision will follow extensive discussions between that community and the operators of the proposed facility. Plans will be submitted to local planning and zoning boards, as well as the local governing board. One option is the construction of a privatized facility on the existing footprint in Camden city.