

RUNNELS COUNTY JAIL



200 S. Hickory Hill
Ballinger, TX 76821

CAPTAIN KIMBERLY DUNN
JAIL ADMINISTRATOR

Phone: (325) 365-2110
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5/4/2023

Dear Runnels County Citizens,

Thank you for taking an interest in the Crisis at the Runnels County Jail. I greatly appreciate your willingness to learn why we need a new facility.

First, I would like to address a couple of the common thoughts I've seen expressed on Facebook.

1. The need for a new jail has nothing to do with capacity. Although we desperately need more storage, office space, and separation cells, we have not outgrown our current jail's inmate capacity.
2. Excess money is not spent on inmates at the Runnels County Jail. Inmates receive minimal clothing, basic hygiene supplies, and the cheapest food we can serve while still being in compliance with the Jail Commission requirement that we serve a dietician approved, balanced diet. The cell walls are cinder block, floors are concrete, bunks are metal with a thin mattress and blanket. Inmate housing, supplies and food are in no way luxurious or excessive in any way. They get the bare minimum, just what is required to meet their human needs. Like any jail, being incarcerated in the Runnels County Jail is not a pleasant experience. Spending Taxpayer Funds to run the Jail is in no way, giving money to criminals. Funding the Jail is an investment in your own personal safety because it provides a place to house criminals, keeping them off the streets and out of your lives.
3. The route the county officials took in an effort to resolve our current crisis at the jail, was in no way secretive. We've been discussing the negative issues at the jail openly at Commissioners Court for several years. Within the past year, these issues have been one of the dominant topics at Commissioners Court, as multiple solution possibilities have been thoroughly discussed. Commissioners Court is open to the public and the minutes of the meetings are public record, available to all county residents. Our Commissioners and County Judge have always striven to make very difficult financial decisions, with the taxpayers' burden always in mind. They are in a very difficult situation and from all I've observed, have acted honorably, making the decisions they each personally feel are in the best interest of the taxpayers.

Before beginning to explain why I believe that we need a new jail, I must explain 3 things that apply to our conversation that will increase understanding of our current situation.

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1. The **Texas Commission on Jail Standards** is the state governing body that oversees county jail operations. County Jails **MUST** function in accordance with Jail Standard requirements. Jail Standards are **NOT** optional. Failure to follow Jail Standards can result in jail shut down or even result in major lawsuits against the county and incarceration of county officials.
2. A legal term applies to our conversation, **Deliberate Indifference**. Deliberate Indifference refers to the intentional disregard of substantial safety or medical harm to a prisoner. In the prison system, the main standard is that guards, prison wardens, medical staff, and mental health staff cannot ignore a health or safety risk. To do so could mean criminal prosecution of the officer in violation. In other words, if our Jail Officers do not intervene to protect the inmates under their care from known health or safety risks, the Jail Officer themselves could be prosecuted and incarcerated for failing to act. This is an important concept to understand in our discussion going forward.
3. **Staffing Requirements** as dictated by Jail Standards. We are required to have 1 Jail Officer manning the Control Room, 1 Jail Officer to conduct Direct Supervision of the inmates within the jail, and at least 1 Jail Officer to perform all other duties, which includes booking in new inmates, processing inmate property, serving meals, passing cleaning supplies, picking up and passing out laundry, passing out hygiene supplies, etc. The list of duties is more than a single Jail Officer can possibly complete. But for the sake of this conversation, keep in mind that 3 Jail Officers is the bare minimum we can have working and still be in compliance with Jail Standards. However, we are only considered in compliance if all required work is accomplished and all Jail Standards are adhered to, which is impossible with only 3 Jail Officers on duty in our facility.

Reasons for a new Jail: Although our current jail is in need of extensive repair and renovation, issues that affect the safety of the staff and inmates are the main reason I feel that we need a new jail. Society and the laws governing jails were different when our jail was built. The design of our jail is not conducive to current incarceration needs. There is no way that I can thoroughly explain all of the aspects that relate to this, I will attempt to explain some of the main contributing factors.

When the Runnels County Jail was built, the majority of the inmates that were housed here were being tried for low level, misdemeanor crimes. Society has changed. The majority of our current inmates are accused of major, often violent felonies. These inmates act out violently in rage against one another, forcing us to separate them from one another. Remember, Deliberate Indifference requires that we prevent known health or safety risks. Our jail was designed with large multi-inmate cells. This design makes it extremely difficult to

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separate these violent inmates from one another because we have very few rooms to house them in. These inmates are also hostile toward Jail Officers. Not being able to properly separate these violent inmates when they first arrive creates more face-to-face interactions between Jail Officers and these inmates as we attempt to move them from cell to cell to prevent violent episodes, which places Jail Officers in harm's way.

Due to poor facility design, these extra face to face interactions increase the danger to Jail Officers. Recently, we've had 9 Jail Officer injuries due to violent inmates. That is more than ever before. It is due to the ever-worsening caliber of inmates that we are required to house. Yet, if we don't intervene to separate these dangerous individuals so others don't get hurt, the Jail Officers themselves will be in jeopardy of incarceration due to Deliberate Indifference. Also, if we fail to act and inmates get injured, even if at their own hand, our county could face a multimillion-dollar lawsuit. We must protect our county by building a facility that is designed to increase the safety of our Jail Officers and inmates alike.

The Runnels County Jail has 7 Separation Cells. These are tiny, 1 person cells, complete with a metal bunk, metal table & chair, toilet, sink and shower. The primary purpose of these cells when the jail was originally built, was to discipline inmates for misbehavior. When I began working at the Runnels County Jail in 2016, these cells stayed full with inmates being disciplined for various reasons. Society has changed. 7 Separation Cells are no longer sufficient for the number of inmates that cannot be housed with others. This is primarily due to the current Mental Health Crisis in Texas.

Texas does not have enough Mental Health beds to meet the current need. There are very few resources available to families to receive help. There are many reasons that the mentally ill end up in County Jails. But the bottom line is that there is nowhere else to send them. They cannot stand trial because they are mentally incompetent. They cannot be released because they will just repeat the process and end up right back in jail, usually within a matter of days. So, the mentally ill go on a waiting list for an available bed at a mental facility. For Misdemeanor inmates, this wait can be as long as a year. For Felony inmates, this wait can be 2 to 3 years. This waiting period passes while incarcerated at the County Jail. Approximately 80% of the individuals incarcerated at our jail have some form of mental illness. It is not uncommon for our little jail to have as many as 3 to 6 individuals incarcerated with SEVERE mental illness. These individuals require an exorbitant amount of time and attention from our Jail Officers. Because our facility is not designed adequately to deal with these challenging and often violent inmates, Jail Officers are at great risk.

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While waiting for a mental health bed, they are cared for by Jail Officers who are not mental health professionals. These difficult individuals create a huge challenge for Jail Officers. During states of confusion or distress, the mentally ill often beat their heads, hands, and feet against the heavy metal doors, windows, or walls of their cells to the point of major self-injury. They often eat their own feces, drink their own urine, or hoard food waste and trash within their cells. Some of our inmates do not understand the concept of a toilet or how to operate a toilet. So, they defecate and urinate all over their cells. Many of our mentally ill will not bathe or maintain any type of personal hygiene. We've had one mentally ill inmate that has PICA, which is an eating disorder. He eats everything, clothing, mattress stuffing, plastic, pretty much anything he has access to. All of these behaviors create a health and safety risk to these individuals, which means we must follow Jail Standards and intervene to avoid charges of Deliberate Indifference and lawsuits against Runnels County.

In reality, these individuals need constant supervision to prevent negative health or safety consequences. Let's look back at our staff who might be available to intervene or provide constant supervision. Our budget allows for 4 Jail Officers per shift. There is almost always a vacant position, someone on vacation, sick leave, personal leave, emergency leave, Workers Comp due to injury, FMLA due to illness or childbirth, etc. So, that leaves 3 Jail Officers on shift, 1 to man the Control Room, 1 to conduct Direct Supervision of all inmates, and 1 to perform all other duties necessary for proper function of the jail. That leaves no one available to stop these inmates from harming themselves or others, no one to clean their unsanitary living conditions, etc. Again, failure to intervene is a direct violation of Jail Standards, which could result in Deliberate Indifference charges and lawsuits against Runnels County.

When we do try to intervene, confusion, delusions, agitation, etc. cause these mentally ill inmates to become violent with the Jail Officers. We've recently had 9 Jail Officer injuries. Of those, 3 were due to highly violent inmates and 6 were due to interactions with mentally ill inmates. Along with inadequate staffing to respond in a sufficient number of Jail Officers to safely intervene, not having a facility designed to properly care for the mentally ill in our charge is creating an extremely dangerous situation for Jail Officers.

We are also receiving an increased number of inmates with intellectual deficiencies. For example, we've recently had one repeat inmate that has the mentality of a toddler. Other regularly recurring inmates have the mentality of an 8- to 13-year-old child. Inmates with mental deficiencies comprise a large percentage of our inmate population. Those with SEVERE intellectual deficiencies like the one I first described, are rapidly increasing in number. These inmates must be housed alone to prevent abuse from other inmates. Like the mentally ill inmates, they require a huge amount of time and attention from Jail Officers because we cannot

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ignore known health or safety risks. We do not have sufficient staff to care for these challenging inmates. Yet, if we do not abide by Jail Standards to properly care for these individuals, knowingly placing their health and safety at risk, our Jail Officers could face incarceration themselves and Runnels County could lose a multimillion-dollar lawsuit. Counties pay out more taxpayer \$ in medically related lawsuits than any other type of jail related lawsuit. Tom Green county recently settled out of court for \$250,000.00 dollars in one such lawsuit. We MUST properly care for these challenging inmates.

Due to bizarre or violent behavior which makes them a risk to themselves, others, or puts the mentally ill or intellectually deficient individuals at risk of getting harmed by other inmates, severe cases must be housed separately from other inmates. Our facility was not designed for the needs of these individuals. Our Separation Unit, which was originally designed for discipline purposes has become a mental health ward and is usually filled to capacity. When our Separation Unit is full, we are forced to utilize our Holding Cells to house these individuals, which means we have no Holding space available for incoming inmates. Therefore, we often house incoming inmates in our library, which was not designed for inmate housing and isn't a safe space to utilize for that purpose.

These issues we're seeing with the mentally ill and intellectually deficient getting housed long term in county jails will not end any time soon. Texas simply does not have adequate services to treat these individuals. These individuals get stuck in county jails because there simply is nowhere else for them to go. Our jail does not have enough separation cells to meet the current need, which means that these individuals are at risk of getting injured or injuring others, including Jail Officers. Therefore, one of the main reasons that we need a new jail is to accommodate these needs for safely housing these individuals that we are required to properly care for while incarcerated long term in our county.

When the Runnels County Jail was built, female inmates were a rarity. We have 3 Female Cells with a total of 12 Female Beds. We have no Female Separation Cells. Society has changed, our Female Section is often full. This creates a problem in separating or isolating Female Inmates due to medical, mental, violence, or pregnancy needs. We have had as many as 3 female inmates with severe mental illness being housed in our jail at one time. Due to their bizarre or violent behavior, they could not compatibly be housed with the other female inmates, creating all of the negative housing issues previously described.

It is required by the Texas Commission on Jail Standards, that inmates be given an opportunity to go to recreation at least 3 times per week for no less than one hour each time. One day while taking a mentally ill

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inmate to recreation, the inmate unexpectedly attacked the two male Jail Officers. This resulted in one officer wearing a shoulder sling due to the injuries sustained from this confrontation.

It is required by the Texas Commission on Jail Standards, that inmates be given cleaning products regularly, to clean their cells. One day, while passing cleaning supplies, a female Jail Officer was suddenly attacked by a large, mentally ill, male inmate. This inmate tried to strangle this officer, who struggled to get free. Suddenly, the inmate let go of her throat and stood back, enabling her to escape. He followed her instructions and returned to his cell. Later, the inmate explained that he had planned to kill this female Jail Officer, but as he strangled her, a voice told him to stop. So, he did.

It is important to note that NO ONE came to this officer's aid. No one was even aware that the assault had occurred until she fled down the hall and informed her co-workers. If that 'voice' hadn't told him to stop, that officer would have most likely been murdered before anyone was even aware of the assault. I thank God for that voice the inmate heard. I personally believe that it was God's voice that saved my friend's life that day!

As I mentioned earlier, we have recently had 9 Jail Officer injuries at the hands of inmates. The Jail Commission Staffing Analysis says that we need 32 staff members to properly run our facility in accordance with Jail Standards and to ensure the safety of both, Jail Officers and inmates. Our current budget allows for 19 ½ staff members. We do not have enough staff to properly complete the necessary duties needed to operate this jail. Nor do we have enough staff to implement all the Jail Commission requirements we must abide by. And most importantly, we do not have adequate staffing to properly monitor what is occurring simultaneously throughout our facility for the protection of our staff or to run to each other's aid when needed. These are the exact reasons we are currently out of compliance with the state due to lack of staffing.

Runnels County citizens, I implore you to take charge of your own safety by doing better at funding the law enforcement officers of the Sheriff's department who put their lives on the line daily, to ensure your safety. Please fund more Deputy and Jail Officer positions to increase our capacity to protect you by keeping these dangerous individuals off the streets and out of your lives. Please fund the building of a new jail that will be designed with safety, current requirements and modern societal needs in mind, so that the danger to the Jail Officers who protect you through their service to our community, will be minimized.

Jail Officers are the behind-the-scenes branch of law enforcement. We are unseen, unheard and often forgotten by our communities. We work in a dangerous and depressing world of human darkness and

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violence. As a result, suicide percentage rates among correctional officers are one of the highest of all law enforcement jobs.

When law enforcement officers get hurt, some people say, 'They knew what they were signing up for.' NO ONE signs up to get shot at, beaten, verbally abused, paralyzed or killed. We do this job, often sacrificing ourselves, to keep our family, friends, and community safe. We go to work at the jail every day, so you can live your daily lives a little safer. We are locked behind doors at night, with the most dangerous and depraved people in our community, so you and your children can sleep a little safer. Spending money on staffing and a new jail doesn't mean you are somehow giving that money to criminals. Spending money on law enforcement is an investment to provide for your own personal safety.

Your Jail Officers are already at risk of harm due to being inadequately staffed. We are working in unsafe conditions due to the disrepair of our facility. The way our current facility is designed further negates our safety to an even greater extent. It is predicted to cost \$150 per \$100,000 annually to build a new jail. We, the men and women who serve to protect you by containing the individuals that would harm you, are working in an unsafe facility because it doesn't meet Jail Standards due to disrepair and a design that doesn't meet the incarceration needs of current society. We do this dangerous job for YOU, to protect YOU, by keeping dangerous individuals safely locked away and out of your lives. We are in danger. How much is our safety worth to you?

Sincerely,

Captain Kimberly Dunn

Runnels County Jail Administrator

I have been hearing people say: why build a jail for criminals? You have it wrong. The jail is for the safety of the community and for those of us who work here. I want you to see who we are. We are a part of this community with families and friends too. The current jail is laid out in such a way that we have to be face to face with inmates on almost an hourly basis. I am not talking about people arrested for Dwi's or possession of marijuana. I am talking about the people you are always complaining about like drug addicts and violent criminals.

Since covid, our population mainly consists of felons. Most of our inmates have some type of violence in their history often its drug or alcohol induced. On top of that, they have messed up their mental capacity so much that they are no longer able to think rationally. More than 80% of our inmate population has a mental or educational defect of some sort.

I am going to tell you about just one inmate that affected me personally. The night he was arrested for the 3rd time in a month because he had been released with an ankle bracelet. We received a call from dispatch to have jailers in the sally port with the restraint chair ready. When they arrived, it took four officers and deputies just to get him out of the vehicle. He had already been tazed multiple times, but he continued to kick, bite, spit, and fight trying to cause the officer's harm. It took 7 officers and jailers combined to get him in the restraint chair and into a holding cell.

We are required by law to check restraints every 15 minutes. This means actually touching his arms and legs to verify his restraints aren't cutting off circulation or causing him damage. We are also required to release each limb after a certain amount of time for 15-minute intervals. When the officers and deputies left, there were 3 jailers on duty, one who left about an hour after the inmate arrived due to already working a full 12-hour shift plus overtime. Who do you think has to do the checks and release this violent person? **The two remaining jailers.**

If we had a padded or violent cell, he could have been placed in there to begin with and the jailers wouldn't have to be hands on. Over the next week this person proceeded to cover his cell in feces and urine. We are required by the jail commission to attempt to clean this and get him showered. Every time this inmate had a chance, he would urinate and smear feces on the door and food port area requiring us to try to clean it, before giving him his food. This same inmate destroyed our booking area in a fit of rage. Later in his stay we had to remove him from a cell after he brutally beat another inmate. We were not aware he had made "hooch" and was high. This incident sent 3 of our officers to the hospital. You can see the physical damage from being slammed into a bunk. What you don't see is the mental and emotional effects. With proper housing for these types of inmates' part of the damage could have been avoided.

All part of the job you say. He is one of the probably too many inmates in the last 2 years that has had an extended stay at our jail. If we had the correct housing, these volatile inmates could have been placed in an appropriate cell and received more appropriate care without endangering our staff or others. All we are asking is to be able to do our jobs and go home to our families.

LT. Shelly B.

To whom it may concern:

My name is Stephanie Smith. I am the jail nurse. As the medical officer for Runnels County, it is my job to maintain each and every individual in our custody's mental, medical, and physical care. I am also responsible for managing the health and well-being of our staff members. I keep hearing comments about how the taxpayer's money would be better spent on repairing roads, helping elderly, and other community needs. We have no control over anything outside of the jail. We don't have jurisdiction over city officers, deputies, dispatchers, city or county employees, etc. Our job is to maintain order inside the jail to keep our community safe. As of now, there is not proper housing for mentally ill, violent, or handicap individuals inside our jail. Even when fully staffed, there is not enough means to provide the proper care for mental, educational, and physically handicapped inmates in our custody. Depending on what diagnosis the mentally ill have, they can and do pose a threat to themselves, and often others when trying to intervene during self-harm. There is limited to no resources to take these individuals to facilities with the proper resources or staff in our state and especially in our area. We do not have any control over how long these challenging inmates remain in our custody. We do the best we can to care for everyone in our custody. There are constant thoughts in the back of our minds while working in our jail that we are working in an unhealthy, and unsafe environment. We choose to do this job to protect each of you in our community, our families, and finally ourselves.

Sincerely,

Sgt. Stephanie Smith, LVN

Hello, My name is Clay Bullock

I retired from the Runnels County Jail in 2019 after 20 years, 7 months service to Runnels County.

I have recently returned to work at the Jail. I started at the old, 1925 Jail beside the courthouse and helped work on the construction of the current jail until we moved all the inmates into it in March of 1999. Although we were excited to be getting a new jail, there were problems from the beginning that most people were not aware of at the time.

With the intention of saving the tax payer's money the county took the lowest bids on plumbing and other construction, then hired their own general contractor who had worked for Brown and Route as a concrete man. The person they had hired for the general contractor had no knowledge of jail construction, operation or most of the responsibilities he had outside of the concrete work.

From the moment we moved into the current jail it was at capacity, with 87 inmates incarcerated. It ran at capacity for many years. Many problems with the construction of the current jail became apparent very soon after we began using the facility

-2 to 3 years after the jail became operational, we started noticing plumbing problems in the pipe chases. The cast iron sewer pipes were deteriorating and crumbling away. The metal was made from a low-grade material that was not holding up to the job. Over the years the county has tried to patch what they could with PVC pipe.

-The sewer gas alone, has been a health hazard for many years.

-The water valves were already obsolete when they were installed. That is why the bid was low. They used the obsolete valves to get the price down for the low bid.

-When we tried to order replacement faucets they were no longer available so we tried to make adjustments.

-The intercoms were the same. They no longer made the speaker for that intercom any longer.

-Jail equipment must be correctional grade, which means, any type of equipment for a jail is 5 to 10 times higher than a residential part in price.

-The jail has never had a maintenance man. All the repairs made to the jail have been because it had stopped working or was broken and had to be fixed.

-The exhaust fans on the roof have a design flaw. When it rains it pours water down the line into the cells they are located above.

-The humidity in the jail has always been exceptionally high causing a rust problem on all the steel doors and metal fixtures in the building. They are literally rusting away.

All the repairs to the jail to date have been a patch for the moment. To fix the problems in the jail, a good 80% of the concrete floor, some of the walls and some of the ceiling will have to be cut out, jack hammered up and all the pipes replaced just for the sewer pipes. The remaining water lines and valves to be replaced, are actually located inside the walls and pipe chases. All of this necessary demolition in order to make the needed repairs, will weaken the integrity of the structure and cause other problems in the future. To replace the steel doors that are rusting around the frame is a major cost in itself. 8

years ago a set of rollers for the sliding doors was a thousand dollars a set. They are only good for about 2 to 3 years before they need replacing.

This is a facility that never has downtime, it is open and operational 24/7. The facility had a poor design for a jail settings when it was built. The male inmates and female inmates are supposed to be out of sight and sound of one another by Jail Standards. The Jail was not set up in a manner that makes that possible. The recreation yard they all use is literally in the male inmate area with windows surrounding it. The female dorm is on the backside of a male dorm where they are able to communicate through the pipe chase between cell walls. We have one set of segregation cells. You either have all males or all females you cannot mix them. What do you do if you have a female inmate you have no way of segregating? We were also never set up to house and take care of the influx on MHMR persons who have made a big impact on jails around the state.

I, myself, am a taxpayer, I am aware that no one wants higher taxes. The burden is the same for this problem weather you build a new jail where, hopefully, a little more thought is put into longevity and quality of the structure instead of the lowest bid, however, the good intentions or we keep pouring money into a structure that will always be a patch job until the next problem arises. You will be paying the tax burden either way. Building the new jail will be a tax increase but I think it will better serve the community in the long run, tax wise. The building of a new jail is not about making room for more inmates or making it easier for the inmates. It is about not pouring more money into a sinking ship, curbing potential lawsuits, and keeping the public safe by housing individuals that cannot abide by the laws set forth in our county.

Most of you in the community are or have been business owners. If you had a building with these problems, you would have code enforcement officer or health inspector to deal with or both. The equivalent for the county is the State Jail Commission. We must abide by their regulations.

My name is Hannah Pobol-Duncan, I am a jailer at the Runnels County Jail here in Ballinger, TX. I wish I could be present tonight, that way a face can be paired with a name, but I am currently working my shift. I will be writing about 2 issues that coincide with one another to make safety an issue at our facility. The first will be the fact that we are still VERY understaffed even after raising our wages. The second will be that our current facility is no longer safe for either staff or inmates.

Firstly, our staffing crisis has been an issue even before I was hired and continues to be. It not only affects my fellow jailers and I, but it also affects our families at home and the safety of our facility. According to research done by Dr. Caterina Spinaris, not getting enough sleep negatively impacts brain function, mental health, and physical health. The following are some of the consequences:

- **Cognitive Impairments:** decline in alertness, attention/reaction time, reasoning and problem solving, and working memory.
- **Mood Disturbance:** Irritability, poor tolerance of frustration, anxiety and depression.
- **Physical symptoms/disease:** Increased inflammation (associated with obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure irregular heartbeat, stroke, cardiovascular disease, some cancers, elevated mortality risk), low energy, and Alzheimer-like neuron changes.

With the staffing how it is currently, most of us get called in constantly because of the lack of manpower. Due to this fact, some jailers only get 1 or 2 days off a month. Imagine working for an entire month, not getting to rest completely or even being able to de-stress from work with your family or friends. How much of a mental toll would that take on you? I was previously employed with TDCJ as a correctional officer. While my class was still in the training academy, there was news that at one of the units, a Captain had gone into a tower on the exterior fence and committed suicide. It is a silent killer in most instances. You would never know.

Not only does the staffing crisis we are having affect our families, but it also affects the safety of the facility. With most of us not having adequate time to rest and get healthy amounts of sleep, we suffer from partial chronic sleep deprivation. In the line of work, we are in, we need to be attentive and be able to diffuse a situation if needed. With

little to no sleep, these two necessities become virtually non-existent. This can cause either an injury to staff or to an inmate themselves.

Secondly, we here at the Runnels County Jail are in dire need of a new facility. There are many issues with the current facility. There are many that I will go over that impact the safety of us, the inmates, and the public. Some of you may say that “23 years isn’t that old”, or “They need to just fix the one that they have”, or “Instead of building a new jail, they need to fix our roads”. Not only does this sadden me, but it also makes me frustrated. Us as jailers are the unsung heroes of First Responders. We aren’t the ones that answer the call when you have an emergency, we aren’t even the ones that show up on scene. We ARE the ones that keep those that commit crimes (some violent) behind our walls. It’s not easy work as some may think. Granted, it isn’t how they make it seem in movies and TV shows either. We still have our day-to-day challenges, but we make it work so we can ensure the public’s safety. No one day is the same. No one inmate is the same.

The following list consists of issues with the current jail:

- **Windows that Face Each Other in General Population of Male Inmates**-We have windows that look into the cells in the back of our facility. Due to the way the back portion is shaped, inmates in other cells can see each other. This makes it to where they can communicate via “prison sign language”. This becomes a concern when a jailer cannot understand what they are signing. At any given time, they could be signing to either assault another inmate or to assault a staff member. This also makes it difficult to separate inmates via sight and sound from one another.
- **Passing Under Doors**- We have doors in the back of the facility that are on sliding tracks, this makes it incredibly easy for inmates to pass items from cell to cell. Due to the doors needing to slide open and closed, there are large gaps underneath. Since the doors need to slide, there is no way for us to block the gaps.
- **Doors/Intercoms Constantly Going Offline**- When our doors do not work from the control panel, we have to manually open them with a key. The floor plan of our facility makes this unsafe in many situations. There are several areas where, when you have to open doors manually, you are within arm’s reach of an inmate.

If you can touch them, they can grab you. When our intercoms go offline, inmates cannot inform us of an emergency.

- **Out of Sight/Sound**- According to Texas Administrative Code, Rule 271.1, juveniles need to be separated by sight and sound from adult inmates and females need to be separated the same way but from males. We cannot achieve this effectively in this facility. All of our inmates share a recreation yard that has windows that look into the male side of the facility. We have tried our best to make it hard to see, but we can only do so much. Also, with how our holding cells are oriented, each holding cell can see into the other. We have a detox cell that is in the middle that can be seen into by one holding cell. We have tried to spray paint the windows, but inmates keep scratching it off in order to see each other.
- **No Exterior Fence**-With no fence around our perimeter, if an inmate was able to escape the facility, there is no secondary barrier to keep them in. Having a fence also allows us to control who has access to the facility. How it is now, anyone can walk up to the front door or walk/drive around the outside of the building.
- **Sewer Gas**-This has been an ongoing issue. Whenever inmates are washing dishes in the kitchen, there is a gas that emits from the drain lines. This gas completely occupies the laundry room and eventually the whole front of the facility. There are times it gets bad enough that we have to turn our exhaust fans in hallways on.

These are only a few of a very long list.

You may be thinking, “well, most of those could be fixed in the building they have now”. My question to you would be, have you ever seen a home remodel show, or even done a remodel yourself? Most times during a remodel, there is always a surprise. The foundation is cracked, the electrical needs to be replaced entirely, or the pipes are all rusted/corroded. Since the jail has been here for over 20 years, and maintained poorly, there is no way of knowing how much damage there actually is. There is a possibility that we would spend more on remodeling the one we have than if we built a new one.

As a closing, I would like to shed some light on some things that have been said about this project. As I mentioned earlier, it is incredibly upsetting that we have members of our community that don't see us. They don't see us as neighbors, friends, family or even people. Since we are out of sight, we are out of mind. It seems that the community doesn't start caring about us until one of us is seriously injured or even in a coffin. Our lives should mean more than a road. I am appalled at how many citizens of this county don't seem to care. Don't care that we are someone's child, sibling, relative, or significant other. We have people that wait and pray for us to come home alive and unharmed. Every day I wake up and come to work, I always think of something a Sergeant once told me, "You have to try every day to leave the same way you came in, and it's not in a body bag.". I leave you with one question in mind, do you think our lives are more valuable than a road yet?



Hannah Pobol-Duncan #707

To whom it may concern,

I have worked at this jail for 23 years; in all that time I have worked on the plumbing in the building, as things wear out. I stood in knee deep water after midnight trying to fix a busted hose in the plumbing access. There is a large metal wrench that is kept in the back pod to manually open the sliding doors. It has been there since I started in 2001. I have had to use it on every door in the jail at least several times a year. The doors run off track by an inmate simply putting their foot in the door while it is closing. The cameras we have are from 3-4 different years, so they aren't compatible with the other. Some door locking mechanisms stay open, so you must slam the door a couple times to make it close. The ventilation that is supposed to remove smoke if there is a fire just pulls smoke from one vent and puts it back into the jail at a different area. We had a fire in the laundry room, and they cut the vents on and then just pulled the smoke into the Sally Port where the evacuated inmates were being held. The booking desk has openings on both sides so any inmate can decide to run around to attack the jailer, or they can simply jump the counter to get to them. The design of this jail might have seemed the best at the time but now it is just outdated and dangerous.

J. Tenen Scriven

Hello, my name is Brandon Vasquez Badge # 717, and I am currently a jailer at the Runnels County Jail. While I wish I could attend this meeting in person, I am currently working the night shift. The letter that you are listening to will address two areas that are major concerns for the safety of the employees at the jail. The first area is that of needing more staff to be able to operate the jail, and the second is the need for the new jail to be built.

Before I started working at the jail, I worked for the Texas Department of Criminal Justice as a Correctional Officer at a maximum-security prison. While there are many differences between working at a state-run prison and a county jail, the aspect of remaining security minded is the same in both jobs. One of the main things that we are taught is to never open or go into a cell that has an inmate in it unless you have at least two officers or jailers in our case. Due to the lack of staffing, we sometimes are not able to have enough staff to do even this. On top of this, there are supposed to be two jailers when entering or opening the cell and one jailer remaining in the front pod in case emergency personnel are needed. This is not always an option due to being short-staffed. A few weeks ago, my Sergeant and I noticed a potential altercation about to happen in one of the cells in the back of the jail. The only option we had available was for my Sergeant to call the one dispatch worker and let him know that we would both be in the back. This is not safe. If something had happened and my Sergeant and I needed help, there would have been no way for someone to get to us due to the two of us being the only ones on shift.

Another thing that was drilled into me while in the TDCJ training academy was the levels of importance when it comes to safety:

- 1) Yourself
- 2) Your coworkers
- 3) The public
- 4) The inmates

This is true for any correctional facility whether it be a prison or a jail as well. "Yourself" is the number one priority because at the end of the day, you must keep yourself safe to ensure you can make it back to your family. Your coworkers are the next important because you must be able to depend on your coworkers and vice versa. The public's safety since we house the inmates and must ensure that they do not escape. Then, obviously, it is still our job to ensure the safety of the inmates. The staffing shortage we face makes these four things more difficult to do in our potentially dangerous field of work.

The staff shortage affects safety in two ways. One, there are not enough staff per shift to be able to complete our daily tasks and maintain a safe level of security. The other way that staffing affects safety is there are not enough staff for all shifts, this means that many of us are called in not just to help for a short time, but to cover entire shifts. There have been multiple jailers who have worked several pay periods with 15 hours and more of overtime. This causes a lack of rest for the staff and creates room for errors in awareness and reaction time. This also causes a decline in the mental state of staff.

Now, for the need of a new jail. The jail is currently in bad physical shape. We as jailers currently have no choice but to carry out our daily duties to the best of our abilities, but due to the current jail being run down, we are often required to do this in a less safe manner.

How we are supposed to operate is to be able to open doors to cells remotely, if need be, to allow certain inmates out for various reasons. This limits the number of face-to-face interactions jailers have with inmates. Since I have started working at the jail, whether our door system works has been a coin flip. More often than not, the system is not working. My understanding is that the electronic components of our door system are so old that replacement parts are no longer being made by any company.

Another safety feature that we are supposed to have is an intercom system that goes to all cells for us to be able to communicate with them from the control pod. This system also allows the inmates to push a button to buzz up to the control pod to speak to us. This would allow them to alert us to any emergencies there might be. There have been multiple occasions where this system has stopped working as well due to how outdated it is.

We do not have a perimeter fence around the current jail. Anytime anyone pictures a jail or a prison, one of the first things they probably imagine is a fence with either barbed or razor wire around the top. That is due to it typically being seen as a necessity for a secure facility. A perimeter fence would work as a barrier. Both in case an inmate happened to find a way to get out, the fence would be a secondary barrier, and a barrier that keeps people away from the jail who shouldn't be there. Currently, anyone could drive up or walk up to any area outside the jail. This is a security issue because someone could attempt to introduce contraband into the jail from the outside this way, or an even worse issue, a family member of an inmate or an ex-inmate could sit outside by staff vehicles and wait to attack any staff leaving at the end of their shift.

These are just a few reasons to show that a new jail is essential for the safety of all staff working at the jail. I have been told that some members of the community have spoken out against the plan to build a new jail, and I fail to understand why. The jail and its staff provide a public service to the Runnels County community. We provide public safety by housing those both accused of a crime and found guilty of crimes. Something that benefits the safety of jail staff also benefits the community.

I have been told that some have said that 23 years is not that old for a jail. However, I encourage those to think of it in this way: Imagine you have a building or a car that you have other people live in or use, and some of those individuals even intentionally try to cause damage to that building or car. Now imagine that the building or car is run down, and you are told that you have the money to buy a brand new one, but someone comes in and tells you that even though you could get a brand new one, you aren't allowed to. Instead, you must replace all the things that are wrong with the building or car, but you must try to do so when no one makes the parts anymore for said building or car. You would be left trying to either rebuild or use "band-aid" solutions. Thus, spending more money than you would have spent if you would have been able to buy a new one.

The last thing I would like to say is this, as much as the public does not want to acknowledge it, correctional workers ARE law enforcement. We have worked hard and have earned some acknowledgment and respect. Thus, you are either a supporter of safety for law enforcement, or you don't support it.

Thank you for your time,

Brandon Vasquez #717

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brandon Vasquez", followed by the number "717". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

RUNNELS COUNTY JAIL



200 S. Hickory Hill
Ballinger, TX 76821

CAPTAIN KIMBERLY DUNN
JAIL ADMINISTRATOR

Phone: (325) 365-2110
Fax: (325) 365-4165

4/10/2023

Dear Judge Miller and Runnels County Commissioners,

You've heard Carl and I discuss the staffing crisis at the jail. We have both told you repeatedly, how dangerous it is to both, the staff and the inmates to operate our jail with the level of insufficient staffing that exists. Now you've heard from our staff, exactly how negatively this crisis is affecting them personally.

I want to touch on the topic of suicide that Officer Pobol-Duncan raised in her letter. The media often covers the high suicide rates of street officers. The officers working in the jails are the behind-the-scenes law enforcement officers, who are out of site out of mind. ABC News reports, "According to a University of California, Berkley Study in 2018, correctional officers are at a high risk for depression, PTSD and suicide. About 1 in 3 are dealing with PTSD, according to the study, as about half of the correctional officers surveyed reporting that they don't feel safe at work. Depression also affects about one-third of the officers." The New York Post reports that, "About 10 percent of prison guards say they have considered or attempted suicide, a rate nearly 3 times that of the general U.S. population... It's even higher among retired guards – about 14 percent, similar to the suicide risk among military veterans. Half of correctional officers expressed at least one symptom of post traumatic stress disorder. Researchers cited officers' frequent exposure to violence and injury, their perception of constant danger, and their reluctance to share traumatic experiences with family members or counselors."

By asking for hiring bonuses, raises, or other action from the court to alleviate this staffing crisis, we are not saying that we are any better than the other county employees. However, our working conditions are different than the other county employees and we deserve to be properly compensated for those differences. We know that the other county employees have difficult jobs to do. We understand that other county employees sometimes come in early or stay late to tackle excess work-loads. We further understand that there are certain dangers in other county jobs. But nothing compares to what the counties Law Enforcement employees, the dispatchers, jail officers, and deputies must endure. If someone calls in sick in any other department, no one gets called in on their day off to cover that absence. No one in the other departments has to give up their weekends off for weeks in a row, due to a staff vacancy.

Everyone seems to think that because we're a small county and a small jail, that our officers aren't at serious risk. That simply isn't true. Our officers get hurt in one way or another by inmates on a regular basis. We walk through the doors of our facility and are immediately immersed in a depressing world of

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danger, working face to face with the most violent, perverse, and mentally ill individuals in our society for 12 or more hours, without break, often for days on end. It is a mentally, emotionally, and physically draining job that takes a huge toll on the staff. Being so short-handed means our staff are unable to get a sufficient, healing break from this environment, which makes the negative effects on the staff much worse.

Before becoming administrator, while working as a floor Jail Officer, any time I'd be at home doing mindless jobs, such as washing dishes, folding laundry, mowing the yard, my mind would always begin running various scenarios of how I would get away from inmates and escape to safety, should one of them attack me or I get pulled into a cell by a group of them. How would I get away if one of them ever tried to rape me? As Administrator, there are always inmates furious with me for something. They think I'm persecuting them due to the various rules we enforce. They blame me for every perceived injustice or hardship they endure at our jail. I'm alone, face to face with inmates throughout the jail on a daily basis. I'm always highly conscious of the fact that one of them could slam me against a wall, possibly strangle me, to the floor, bashing my head against the concrete and seriously injure or kill me before help could ever arrive. I am not exaggerating. These are the real risks and therefore the thoughts that haunt us concerning our jobs. The danger of this job is an ever-present mental affliction suffered by our Jail Officers. We are aware of the constant danger we are in, every moment that we are on the job, and it frequently occupies our minds when off work. Our jail has never had enough staff to function safely or properly. With the current staffing crisis, our working conditions are more dangerous than ever before. We desperately need our time off to maintain proper mental, emotional, and physical health. We must find a solution to end this staffing crisis.

According to our Jail Inspector, the absolute minimum # of Jail Officers we can have staff the jail at one time must be no less than 3, 1 to cover the pod, 1 for 1-48 supervision, 1 for all other duties. We didn't have time to tabulate the entire past 9 months. We tabulated July – Oct of 2022. During those months, we have operated the jail with only 2 Jail Officers on duty 122 of the 246 shifts. We have operated the jail an additional 38 shifts with only 2 Jail Officers on duty for part of the shift. Therefore, we have operated out of compliance without even the minimum skeleton crew 65% of the time. This is not only, extremely unsafe to staff and inmates alike, but completely out of compliance with Jail Standards. There is no way we can do everything we are required to do with 3 Jail Officers on duty, much less 2.

Runnels County pays our Jail Officers significantly below the state average. We cannot attract applicants to this **dangerously hostile, mentally and emotionally taxing work environment** with the current pay being offered by Runnels County. I mentioned in my email to you last week, about the **abusively**,

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extensive hours and constantly fluxuating schedules the jail staff are being forced to endure by Runnels County. It is time for this court to take action to rectify this injustice to it's employees by raising our pay rate to the state average, implementing a hiring incentive, or **something** to alleviate these unfair and unsafe working conditions. This is **your responsibility** as County Commissioners to take action to rectify this crisis.

Sincerely,

Captain Kimberly Dunn

Admin - Runnels County Jail

4/10/2023

Dear Judge Miller and Runnels County Commissioners,

I am speaking on behalf of all jailers at the Runnels County Jail. We are here today because this topic is vitally important to us. Two of us even cancelled Dr's apt.s to be here today. Several that couldn't be here today due to work, wrote letters to be read on their behalf.

This current staffing shortage has continued for so long, that it has worn us all down. We are mentally, emotionally, and physically exhausted. We cannot continue working this way.

The hours we work are constantly being changed in an effort to cover the busiest parts of two shifts. As vacancies occur, we get moved from one shift for a few weeks or months, to another, then back again. We are repeatedly required to come in early or stay late. All of this turbulence wreaks havoc with our personal plans and takes a major toll on our mental, emotional and physical well being.

Other than rare, unusual situations, county employees in other departments get weekends, holidays and their other regularly scheduled time off with their families. We work holidays, weekends, and get called in on a regular basis on overtime to work a shift, conduct an inmate transports, etc. Yes, we get holiday and overtime pay. We are grateful. But we would much rather be home with our families.

We have personal lives that are being negatively impacted by this staffing crisis. Many of our marriages and other relationships are having negative complications due to the excessive hours we are working and expected to be on call. We miss special family events. We miss special holidays. Our personal plans get ruined by being called in unexpectedly. It's one thing if this occurs because we are scheduled to work. It's totally different when we get called in on days that we shouldn't even be on call, because we are so short-handed that there's no one else to work. We would rather be at home with our spouses, children, and other loved ones when scheduled off, than be called in yet again.

We have been subjected to these unreasonable working conditions for almost a year. When we say this, we aren't just talking about working 12-hour days, sometimes it's 14 to 16-hour days that we work. And we aren't just talking about working two or three days in a row. We have worked as many as 7 to 20, 12-hour days straight. That's the equivalent of working 85 to 240 hours straight, before getting a single day off.

WE ARE TIRED! We cannot continue in this pattern of ABUSE. We implore you to take action to raise our pay, institute a hiring incentive, do SOMETHING to help alleviate this UNFAIR SUFFERING THAT WE ARE BEING FORCED BY RUNNELS COUNTY TO ENDURE.

Thank you, Lt. Shelly Basart

Hello, I am a night shift Sgt at the Runnels County Jail. I want to tell you about a few situations in which the jail's safety and safety of me and my coworkers were compromised due to insufficient staffing.

One night while working there was a door that was constantly unlocking on its own it was a vestibule door to some of our male cells. To give you an idea there is a door that goes from the hallway into a small square space with two cell slider doors on either side and a door to a mop closet straight ahead. The door that was constantly unlocking was the hallway door. That was the start of a scary night for me and my jailer. Later that night, after doing laundry and passing and picking up trays, a few more doors started to do the same thing continuously unlock. It was a female cell door and a Holding door. Right after the nurse passed our meds the situation quickly became dangerous with seg holding cell doors, female cell doors, holding cell doors, and the pod doors that go to the offices that we use to do paperwork, watch cameras, control doors with the board, hold keys, and hold our defenses against inmates if the case arises such as pepper spray and pepper pistols. No matter how many times I, my jailer, and our nurse closed these doors they were opening just as fast. With the seg, female, holding, and pod doors opening that would give an inmate access to our pod and we would be outnumbered by the inmates in holding and seg alone face to face. Seg is used to house inmates anywhere from being violent to being mentally ill and usually inmates are put there because they cannot safely be around others in population. Holding houses new inmates that we are unfamiliar with and inmates who are intoxicated. This situation was becoming very scary very quickly. Not only are there just me, my jailer, and our nurse alone to deal with this situation at hand we also have 20-minute rounds to be keeping up. That means our nurse was alone in the pod while me and my jailer did observation checks on all inmates throughout the jail. We had to call someone in to have more staff in case the situation turned awry and until we could get a hold of our Captain Kim and try to find a solution. We woke our Captain up and had her come to the jail and the solution ended up being to disconnect the panel that allows us to remotely open doors so that we would be functioning solely manual thus creating another large problem for only two workers opening cell doors by hand alone.

Another situation where it was only me and another jailer was when one of our inmates started having a seizure and had to be transported out by ambulance. We were doing our best to cover the pod and pass trays and do our daily tasks when an inmate told us they weren't feeling very well. Soon after dinner we got a buzz from a male cell saying that inmate was having a seizure. The others said that he had hit his head against the wall while seizing in his bunk. Me and my jailer had to leave the pod unoccupied while we went to the back of the jail to assess this situation and so that neither of us had to roll a cell door alone with 4 male inmates one of which having a seizure. We alerted the nurse, but this inmate was past our protocols for this situation, so we called the nurse. It was decided that he should be taken to a hospital for evaluation. During this time the pod had been left unoccupied, I was left alone in a cell with 4 male inmates, and a dispatcher was removed from her station to come to our side of the jail to allow the ambulance in because me and my jailer were tied up. We still had rounds to cover and daily jailer duties to complete such as dinner and medication passes.

Something else that required both workers in the building to be at the back of the facility was an inmate not complying with observation checks. After a few rounds of checks this inmate was not able to be seen because he had gone into the shower part of his cell and would not come out. This was dangerous because we were not able to verify if this person was still safe and not being self-destructive or anything else along those lines. Since we had not seen this inmate in over 40 minutes, we knew we

had to go in the cell even though it was only us two. This inmate had also previously talked about harming themselves so that made this situation more dire. We prepared ourselves with our pepper pistols and handcuffs and went to the back to ensure the safety of this inmate. At the door we instructed him to come out and he would not comply, so we had to roll the door and try to get this inmate out of there. While in the cell we couldn't see what this inmate was doing behind the curtain and wall in the bathroom area this was scary and potentially very dangerous. We closed in and got sight of this inmate and were able to get him cuffed and taken to the front to be put in detox and on suicide watch.

These instances are very scary because if anything were to happen, we wouldn't be able to get to safety or get help because with two people and having to go to the back for these situations we are forced to break policy and compromise the safety of the jail, other inmates, and most importantly ourselves. Those three situations are just a few of the problems we have had to face on my shift alone. At night I only have myself and a jailer. There are no other staff here such as admin or even deputies on duty. If an emergency arose, I would have to wake backup up and wait for them to get dressed and here before taking any next steps and most of the time that's not an option. I was faced with a really difficult question by my somewhat new jailer. I was asked "what do we do if there is an emergency that happens that requires both of us to aid?" and I was at a loss for words because I wasn't even able to give this jailer an answer. We are not supposed to roll doors with only one jailer present, we are not supposed to leave the pod unattended, we have to get dinner passed and picked up and medication passed within timely manners, and still sometimes book new incoming inmates all the while doing 20-minute rounds. This is impossible with only me and my jailer. We fly by every night hoping that we don't find ourselves injured or in an emergency alone with no help.

We have families just like every one of you. I have a brother that will be turning two this Sunday and I will have missed both of his birthdays to work. I get to spend only one end of the year holiday with my family if I am not called to work for whatever reason. Being so short we are being called in and having to work 12-hour shifts for a week straight or longer. This is an extremely stressful job and environment and having to do this while only having you and another person is beyond exhausting and leaves so much room for error and accidents. This is mentally and emotionally deteriorating for everyone having to miss out on life with our families. My coworker and I have been called to the jail every set of days we have off for the past couple of months and because it is only us two, we have to cover on call days for a full shift of 4 people, so we are always having to stay home and ready to go to work on all our days off. I am afraid that if this continues more staff will leave and make things so much harder for all of us, having to work more hours to the point where the jail can no longer function properly and safely. I was called in recently to work because there were only two jailers on the other night shift, and one had gotten Covid and was very sick. When I arrived at the jail, I was sick myself throwing up and so dizzy I almost couldn't complete a round. We did not have anyone else available to work so the nurse was forced to decide on what sick person she needed to stay at the jail. I had to finish the shift by sitting down and having to close my eyes in between every round to keep from passing out or throwing up. It is imperative that we get help, or we will be on a steady decline for the future of our jail.

Haley Beams

4/11/2023

Dear Judge and Commissioners,

My name is Melody Gallant. I began working at the jail as a part-time Administrative Assistant. It became apparent to me very quickly that the Jail Officer staff was overburdened with an excessive work load and overtime due to short staffing. I could clearly see how desperately the Jail Officers needed help. So, I paid for my own jail school, doing the on-line coursework on my own time, to get my jailer's license.

I continued working as an Admin. Asst. and began working hours as a jailer as well to help alleviate the burden on the Jail Officers. But the need for more help just continued to increase over time. So, I resigned my Admin. Asst. position and became a full time Jail Officer. The need for staff continued to increase over time. So, I then agreed to take a Shift Sgt. position, which is where I continue to serve.

During my short time working at the jail, I've seen Jail Officers switch from day shift to night shift, then back again. I've seen Jail Officers work constantly changing schedules, 6 to 6, 8 to 8, 10 to 10, Noon to Midnight, for weeks at a time, in an effort to cover all duties and remain in compliance with the state.

Besides that, they Jail Officers are constantly being called give up their time off to come in to work on overtime due to vacancies or illnesses.

In addition to that, there is a huge amount of continuing education our staff must fulfill; jail school, suicide prevention training, tactical defense, pepper pistol training, first aide-cpr-aed training, mental health training, alcohol & drug detox training, de-escalation & conflict resolution training, etc. Since there aren't enough staff to train during scheduled hours, staff must give up their time off to train as well.

The physical toll this type of constant schedule change and excessive overtime is taking on the Jail Officers mental, emotional and physical health is apparent. I implore you to please do whatever is necessary to attract more qualified applicants to work in our facility to alleviate this inappropriate burden on your current staff.

Sincerely,

Sgt. Melody Gallant

RUNNELS COUNTY JAIL

STEPHANIE SMITH, LVN
JAIL NURSE



200 S. Hickory Hill
Ballinger, TX 76821
Phone: (325) 365-2110
Fax: (325) 365-4165

My name is Stephanie Smith. I am the jail nurse. I am here to speak on my co-worker's behalf. This staffing crisis has got to stop. As a medical professional, I never dreamed I would be working during a pandemic. There is no set protocol to follow in my position as the jail nurse. I should never have to pick which sick staff member to send home. I should never have to ask sick staff members to stay at work, especially when they are running fever. I am not physically able to cover day and night shifts or believe me I would. I have. I will again. And then when this emotionally and physically draining job wears each of us out completely, which of you are willing to cover?

[Type text]

To whom it may concern,

My name is Adrah Peltier and I have worked as a jailer for Runnels County for over 6 years. I wanted to be here in person to tell my story but I'm currently on an inmate transport, on my day off during the week that I had taken vacation time to spend with my family and friends. I consider myself a dedicated and hard working employee, often sacrificing my personal time for my job. Throughout my years working at Runnels County Jail, I have witnessed Administrators struggle to correct several major issues and repeatedly be met with simple dismissal of the argument or blatant refusal by the commissioners to acknowledge or assist in the matters. As a result of insufficient staffing during my time here, I have worked as many as seventeen twelve hour shifts in a row in an environment that is often mentally and physically taxing, hostile, and one where I must remain ever vigilant for staff and inmate safety. I have worked holidays, weekends, and frequently been called in to work during my scheduled time off, often knowing that I did not have the adequate staff to handle a major emergency situation, such as fire or natural disaster. As a result of poor building maintenance I work in an environment of toxic sewer gases, hazardous molds, dangerous plumbing and improper working equipment, and I also have to deal with inmates in this facility as well, many of which are mentally handicapped/ill. Please take into consideration all the lives that are affected by this establishment, whether they be staff, inmate and/or the community, when considering our needs such as staffing, repairs, and maintenance.

thank you

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Adrah Peltier', followed by a long horizontal flourish and the number '790'.

Adrah Peltier

Jailer Runnels County Jail

I have worked at Runnels County Jail for almost 7 years. During my time at Runnels County Jail we have had multiple issues with the facility: Mechanical, environmental, and residential.

Mechanically I have dealt with doors that will only open when manually operated. This created several issues at the jail. Jailers come into contact with inmates more often, exposing us to more physical risks, increasing the risk of keys being taken, or if we have to use the manual door opener it offers the inmates access to a possible weapon. During a storm the power recently went out and staff had to physically leave the building to get the "automatic" generator on line. One staff member remained in the building while this was done, thankfully there were no other incidents at the time. This power failure resulted in the total loss of our Control board for more than a week, resulting in jailers having to monitor inmates every 15 minutes. Speaking of the control panel, it has issues every time there is rain, snow, heavy humidity, or there's a program update. Another thing, the roof leaks horribly every time it rains which causes damage to ceiling tiles, environmental issues, and creates fall risks. The heating and cooling systems are in dire need of repair. Thermostats aren't reading correctly in any of the cells. Inmates complain of freezing in the summer, yet the temperature on the thermostats says its 95 degrees. We've had constant issues with units freezing up in the summer and inmates going without cooling systems. These faulty units wreak havoc on the humidity in the building as well, causing condensation in the building. The camera systems are constantly having issues as well, these are vital to in house investigations and inmate safety and security itself. Correctly operating camera systems would allow for constant supervision of the entire facility.

Environmentally in the jail I have been exposed to toxic sewer gasses from inappropriately maintained plumbing. The jail has never had a day that I can remember that didn't smell like sewage. Inmates and staff are constantly complaining about the smell, water flow issues, slow drains, and water quality. If that weren't enough to deal with because of the cooling and heating units we have various types of mold constantly growing in the ceiling tiles, inmate showers and toilet areas, along the tops of the walls near the ceiling and in the control pods, this also creates a slip hazard in some parts of the building because humidity is so great it collects on the floor. Imagine having to deal with running to an emergency situation in these conditions. The environmental issue impact us on many levels. I have never had to resort to allergy medication until I started working here, now I have 3 prescriptions for allergies and still have issues with them. Asthmatics are using inhalers more frequently while at work and having more issues with breathing in this environment.

Then we have the residential risks. Yes the inmates are members of our community, but they have violated the rights of the community. Many times, they have an extreme hatred for any law enforcement member, as we are often blamed for their situation. We come into close contact with them constantly in a limited area and they are frustrated, angry and at times aggressive. We are always on our guard as the situation is changing constantly so we can be prepared the many scenarios that we may have to deal with at any given time. Some of the things that we experience as jailers are upsetting in the least, we deal with adult offenders who are violent, but also adults that are mentally lacking or ill. These are the inmates that are most taxing to us. These are adults with little or no self-control, mental capacity, hygiene, and go through instantaneous behavioral changes repeatedly. The inmates subject us assaults with body fluids, threats to us and family, and more, all while trying to get us to do something for them,

This job is not for the meek or mild and takes its toll on the employee because of the types of people we deal with every day. As a jailer one has to maneuver through an endless ever-changing hostile environment dealing with just the inmates themselves and then you have to consider all the other issues in the facility as well. These risks are unacceptable to our jail staff as we have families that we want to return home to in the same physical and mental health that we started our jobs with. A fully functioning, reliable, and secure facility is vital to inmate, staff and community welfare.