



**Central Office**

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April 25, 2018

Sheriff Victor Williams  
Itasca County Sheriff's Office  
440 First Avenue NE  
Grand Rapids, MN 55744

Mr. Brett Skyles  
Itasca County Administrator  
Itasca County Courthouse  
123 Northeast Fourth Street  
Grand Rapids, MN 55744

Sheriff Williams and Mr. Skyles:

Thank you for meeting with me on Thursday, March 29, 2018 and providing a tour of the Itasca County Jail. As you are aware, this meeting was precipitated by concerns with your facility that had been identified in the current and several prior inspection reports. Your willingness to meet and work collaboratively towards a resolution to the public safety needs of Itasca County was evident during our meeting and discussion that day.

The various issues we discussed are as follows:

During the 2017 annual inspection of your facility, there were fifteen (15) mandatory rules that were not in compliance. This equates to a compliance rating of approximately 88%. Substantial compliance with rules, according to the Chapter 2911 rules, requires 100% compliance with mandatory rules. Many of these mandatory rules that are not in compliance are directly related to physical plant conditions. These deficiencies include significant problems with plumbing and heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems at the facility. The HVAC system failure last summer almost resulted in the need to close and vacate the facility until repairs could be accomplished and most recently the facility has had several days without hot water due to a failing boiler system.

The National Institute of Corrections has determined the average life expectancy of a corrections facility that operates twenty-four hours per day to be approximately 25-30 years depending on facility usage. The Itasca County jail has been in operation for approximately thirty-five (35) years, with an expansion in 1998, and now has a capacity of ninety-eight (98), which is an increase of forty (40) beds from the original design capacity. Support spaces (medical, programming, recreation, property storage, intake/booking) were not sized to account for this increased capacity and use. The design of the facility is also considered linear design which is more staff intensive than the design characteristics and operations of a modern jail facility. There does not appear to be any further options to extend the life expectancy, or to improve the operational efficiencies of the existing facility beyond those that have already been undertaken by the county.

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The facility also lacks adequate housing space to ensure proper separation of inmates according to an approved classification system. These are both mandatory rules and were not in compliance in the 2017 inspection. Coupled with higher populations, it does not appear the current facility has the capacity to meet the requirements of these rules.

There were several areas of staffing deficiencies that were cited in the last inspection. The approved staffing plan indicates a need for thirty (30) full-time equivalents, or 30 staff. The county has only approved the Sheriff to hire and staff the facility with twenty-four (24) staff, six (6) staff short. Operating 6 staff short puts an additional burden on those staff that are employed and results in overtime, staff turnover and operational duties not being addressed as required. Some of these positions include staff to complete ancillary functions such as court escorts, medical transports, as well as having adequate staff to complete well-being checks and maintain the facility. This has been an on-going issue that must be addressed within timelines established by the Inspection and Enforcement Unit.

All of these deficiencies negatively impact the safety and security of the facility, the staff, daily operations and the citizens of Itasca County. Based on the limitations of the current facility, physical plant deficiencies, increasing inmate populations, facility operations and inspection deficiencies listed in several inspection reports, the following action is being taken with respect to the authorization for the Itasca County Jail to continue to be approved for operations:

The Itasca County jail will be approved to operate with a "Sunset Authorization." This action is set forth in Chapter 2911.0300 INTENDED USE AND NONCONFORMANCE WITH RULES, subpart 4, letter D. The sunset authorization provides a date for which the facility will no longer be authorized to hold persons within the facility. The Department of Corrections provides a time frame in which local officials determine needs, and to develop a plan to address those needs. If the final determination is for the county to replace the facility, time is allocated for design and construction of a new facility, or to make appropriate repairs and renovations to meet the county's public safety needs. As such, the sunset date for the Itasca County Jail shall be September 1, 2021.

As we discussed at our meeting one of the first steps in this process is to develop a "Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (CJCC)." This council is designed to help improve efficiencies in moving individuals through the courts and criminal justice system, and to address systemic issues in the criminal justice processes. Agencies and individuals that are typically involved in a CJCC include court personnel/judicial, public defenders, probation directors, county attorney's office, law enforcement, sheriff's office, and county administration. This council should be developed as soon as possible. This council also makes recommendations for the formation of a jail study committee which takes on the task of determining a course of action to meet the future jailing needs of the county. Technical assistance is typically available from the National Institute of Corrections and I would recommend that Itasca County officials solicit their assistance early on in this process.

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Staff from the Inspection and Enforcement unit are available to assist you and your staff with the transition/changes as set forth in this letter, and with other operational and physical plant concerns that you may have moving forward.

Again, I appreciate meeting with both of you and Jail Administrator Lucas Thompson and look forward to working with you on these matters of mutual concern. If you have any questions please feel free to contact me at 651-361-7234.

Sincerely,



Ron Solheid, Deputy Commissioner  
Minnesota Department of Corrections

C: Tom Roy, Commissioner of Corrections  
Tim Thompson, Inspection and Enforcement Director  
Greg Croucher, Sr. Inspector  
Lucas Thompson, Itasca County Jail Administrator  
Itasca County Jail file (S-drive)