

April 20, 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:

First, I would like to take a moment and thank you for meeting with me on Thursday, March 29, 2018. As you may be aware, this meeting was precipitated by concerns in regard to your current jail facility. Your willingness to meet shows initiative and a willingness to work collaboratively towards a resolution to the public safety needs of your community.

After touring your facility, we discussed a number of different issues and potential solutions to these issues. The various issues are listed 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). The National Institute of Corrections has determined the average life expectancy of a facility that operates twenty-four hours per day to be approximately 25-30 years depending on facility usage. The Itasca County facility has been in operation for approximately thirty-five (35) years, and with an expansion in 1998, now has a capacity of ninety-eight (98), which is an increase of forty (40) beds from the original capacity.

In addition to the facility being beyond the projected life expectancy, the facility also lacks adequate recreation, programming, and other functional space. The design of the facility is also considered linear, and is antiquated and more staff intensive than the design characteristics and operations of the facilities of today. There does not appear to be any further options to extend the life expectancy, or the operational efficiencies of the existing facility.

The facility also lacks adequate housing space to be able 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.

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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. That is six (6) staff short. Operating 6 staff short puts an additional burden on those staff that are employed. It equates to overtime, and operational duties not being completed. 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.

All of these deficiencies impact the facility operations and physical plant limitations, as well as impacting the safety and security of the facility, the staff, and the citizens of Itasca County. Based on the limitations of the current facility, physical plant deficiencies, increasing populations, facility operations and limited efficiencies, and inspection deficiencies, the following action shall be set forth:

Due to the numerous deficiencies noted throughout this letter, and the lack of adequate options to address these deficiencies, the Department of Corrections has determined the next course of action to be 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 for which to determine needs, and to make 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.

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 legal/court and criminal justice system, and to address systemic issues in the criminal justice process. Agencies/individuals that are typically involved in a CJCC include court personnel/judicial, Public Defenders, Probation agents, County Attorney's office, Law Enforcement, Sheriff's Office, and County Administration. This council should be developed as soon as possible.

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.

If you have any questions or concerns 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)