



RESHAPING THE SHARED RESPONSIBILITY OF COUNTY JAILS

2026 Legislative Focus

Kentucky's county jails are at a crisis point, with fiscal court subsidies rising more than 76% in six years and counties forced to raise taxes or cut essential services just to keep their facilities operating.

KACo is urging lawmakers to act now by **adopting a comprehensive jail plan** that provides targeted incentives for regional solutions, redefines state and county responsibilities, and establishes a sustainable inmate housing model. Without immediate action, the financial strain will continue to deepen, threatening both local budgets and public safety.

County Jail Solutions

1

Incentivize Regional Jails

Provide one-time funding for regional jail construction, offer incentives for regionalization, and update the regional jail authority board statute. Allow 96-hour holdover facilities and increase the supplement for closed county jails.

2

Clarify Responsibility for Pre-Trial Felony Detainees

Reimburse counties when an inmate receives credit for time served on their felony sentence.

3

Redefine State Inmate Housing Model

Require the Department of Corrections to have contracts with each fiscal court or regional jail authority based on actual costs. Require jails to provide certain programming as a criterion for housing state inmates.

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County General Fund Subsidy for Jails FY2019-25



Source: KACo analysis of Uniform Financial Information Reports, FY2019-25 (excludes Fayette and Jefferson)

The time to act is now. Contact your legislator today!

- **County jail funding is no longer sustainable under the current model.** Over the past six years, counties have increased general fund transfers to jails by 76% — from \$96.5 million to nearly \$170 million* — **diverting resources from essential local services** and underscoring the need for more economies of scale and regionalization.
- **Counties shoulder the full cost** of housing felony defendants for months or even years while cases await trial. It's only upon sentencing that a per diem kicks in for state inmates, and counties get no reimbursement when an inmate receives credit for time served. It's time to **clarify the responsibility for pre-trial felony detainees**.
- **The state inmate housing model is fundamentally broken.** The current \$35.34 per diem covers **barely half the true cost** of incarceration, falling far short of the \$63.44 average daily cost per inmate in FY2025.* Counties are forced to absorb this growing funding gap.

**Excludes Fayette and Jefferson counties*



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