

Blount County Jail

Jail Expansion Evaluation

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University of Tennessee

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Contents

I.	INTRODUCTION.....	2
II.	OVERVIEW OF THE JAIL.....	2
III.	JAIL PHYSICAL PLANT.....	8
IV.	POPULATION PROJECTIONS.....	11
V.	CONCLUSION.....	14

I. INTRODUCTION

- a. On April 23, 2013 I toured the Blount County Justice Center. This tour was at the request of the Blount County Corrections Partnership Committee in preparation of a meeting scheduled for the same day.
- b. During the tour we looked at inmate housing areas and jail support areas. The jail appears to be well maintained and operated. Significant crowding and strains on support areas were noted.
- c. A presentation was made before the Blount County Corrections Partnership Committee on April 23rd. Four main challenges were identified during the tour and discussed during the meeting. They included jail crowding; inability to properly classify and house inmates; staff are working harder to keep staff and inmates safe; inmates are being warehoused thus an increase in tension among the population; and the need to project into the future. At the request of the committee, this basic assessment was put together to determine the need for jail expansion.

II. OVERVIEW OF THE JAIL

- a. The Blount County Justice Center was constructed in 1999 with renovations occurring in 2006 and 2007. The facility has a Tennessee Corrections Institute certified capacity of 350 of which, 286 are male beds and 64 are female beds. The fiscal year 2012 – 2013 jail operating budget is \$7,415,314. The facility is staffed with 81 full time and 6 part time staff. The facility holds pretrial and sentenced local and state inmates as well as having a contract with the U.S. Marshals Service to house federal pretrial inmates.
- b. The following table provides the average daily population for males, females, and total population covering the period of 2004 - 2013.

Fiscal Year	Male	Male Capacity	Male 90% Capacity	Female	Female Capacity	Female 90% Capacity	Total	Total Capacity	Total 90% Capacity
2004		286	257		64	58	334	350	315
2005		286	257		64	58	356	350	315
2006		286	257		64	58	343	350	315
2007		286	257		64	58	372	350	315
2008		286	257		64	58	405	350	315
2009		286	257		64	58	425	350	315
2010	310	286	257	83	64	58	393	350	315
2011	384	286	257	89	64	58	473	350	315
2012	396	286	257	92	64	58	488	350	315
2013	451	286	257	94	64	58	545	350	315
Average	385	286	257	90	64	58	413	350	315

- c. As the data reflects the jail has been averaging 413 inmates in custody over the last ten years. Specific data on female inmates was obtained from

the Tennessee Department of Corrections single day snapshot report. The total female inmate population exceeded bed space capacity during the five years evaluated. Over the last 10 years, the average daily population reflects the jail being at 118% of its bed space capacity. Experts suggest that a jail is at its capacity when it reaches approximately 90% of its bed space capacity. For Blount County the target capacity would be 315 (257 male beds and 58 female beds). This permits for flexibility of housing and separation of inmates and spikes in the inmate population that occur from time to time.

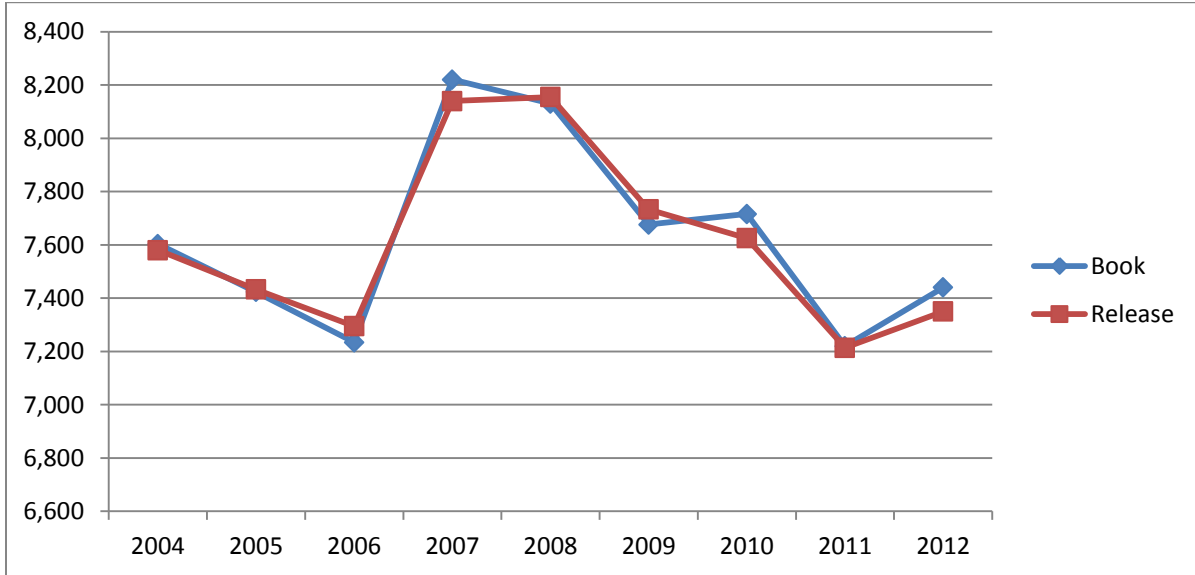
- d. The following table separates discretionary inmates (those we choose to house through contract or agreement) and non-discretionary inmates (pretrial, sentenced misdemeanants, local felons, those sentenced to TDOC locally waiting bed space). The data provided for FY2013 was obtained from one day snap shot reports from the Department of Corrections. As such the data during FY2013 does not account for highs and lows in the inmate population. When looking at this table we can see that if all discretionary inmates were removed from the facility the male inmate population would be under the 90% capacity. The female population would still exceed available bed space. It is also important to note that (in FY 2012) an average of 86 state inmates was being held. While considered as a discretionary inmate, local jurisdictions are required to house these inmates due to a backup in the Department of Corrections. Given that, Blount County’s average daily population would easily exceed available bed space even if there was an elimination or significant reduction in the housing of federal inmates.

Averages	FY 2011	FY 2012	FY 2013	Average
Total Population	473	488	545	502
Capacity	350	350	350	350
90% Capacity	315	315	315	315
State & Federal	190	173	188	184
All Other Inmates	283	315	357	318
Average Males	381	398	460	413
Male Beds	286	286	286	286
90% Male Capacity	257	257	257	257
Male State & Federal	173	156	177	169
Male (all others)	208	242	283	244
Average Females	89	90	85	88
Female Beds	64	64	64	64
90% Female Capacity	58	58	58	58
Female State & Federal	17	17	11	15
Female (all others)	72	73	74	73

- e. The following table and chart provides information regarding bookings and releases. We see that the average annual bookings between 2004 and

2012 were 7,629 and average releases were 7,574. There was an increase in bookings during 2007 through 2010. Although we see high booking numbers the releases track fairly consistently with the numbers of intakes.

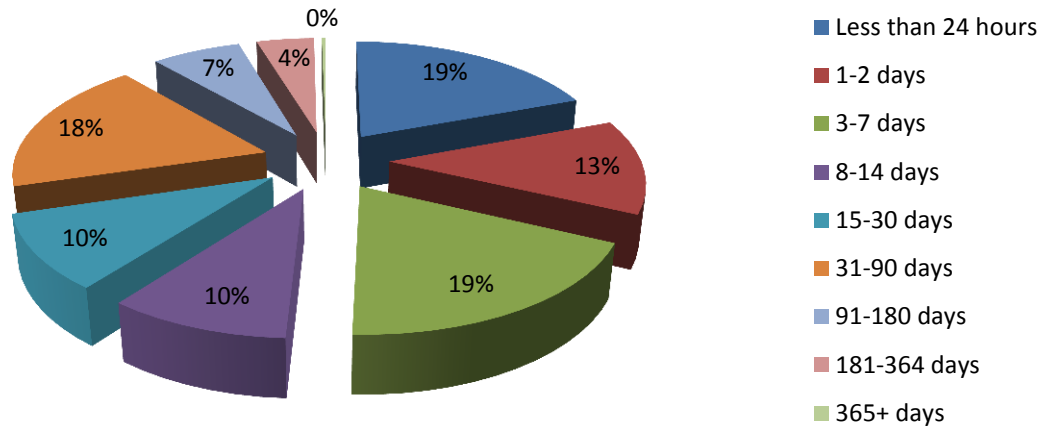
	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	Average
Booking	7,603	7,423	7,234	8,220	8,130	7,676	7,716	7,220	7,440	7,629
Release	7,580	7,433	7,295	8,140	8,155	7,733	7,265	7,214	7,350	7,574



f. Another piece of information looked at was the length of stay for each inmate at their time of release in during random months in 2011 through 2013. Again the following charts and graphic provides the results of that review.

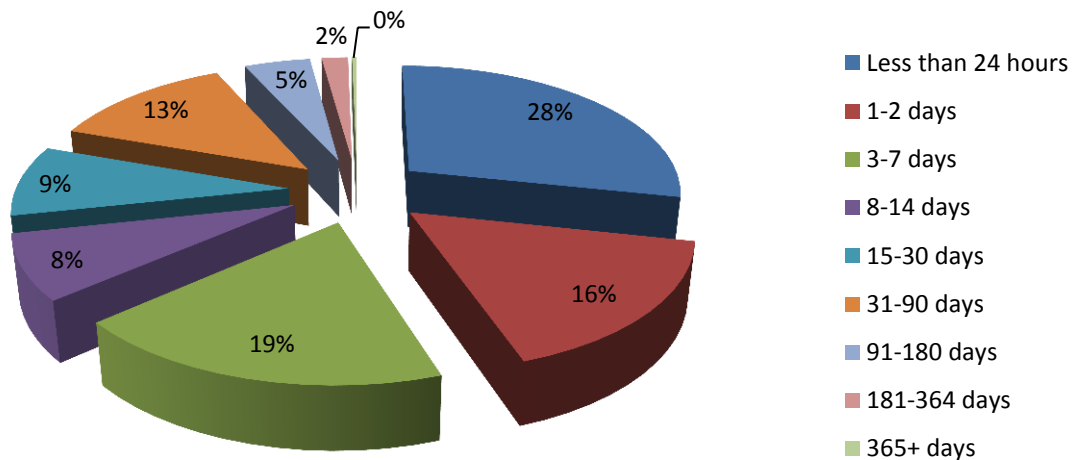
Time in Custody at Release - Males	2011	2012	2013
Less than 24 hours	118	123	99
1 - 2 days	85	80	59
3 - 7 days	120	116	94
8 - 14 days	69	59	43
15 - 30 days	52	61	63
31 - 45 days	85	94	142
91 - 180 days	46	48	25
181 - 365 days	29	26	22
1 year +	2	2	1

Average Length of Stay - Males

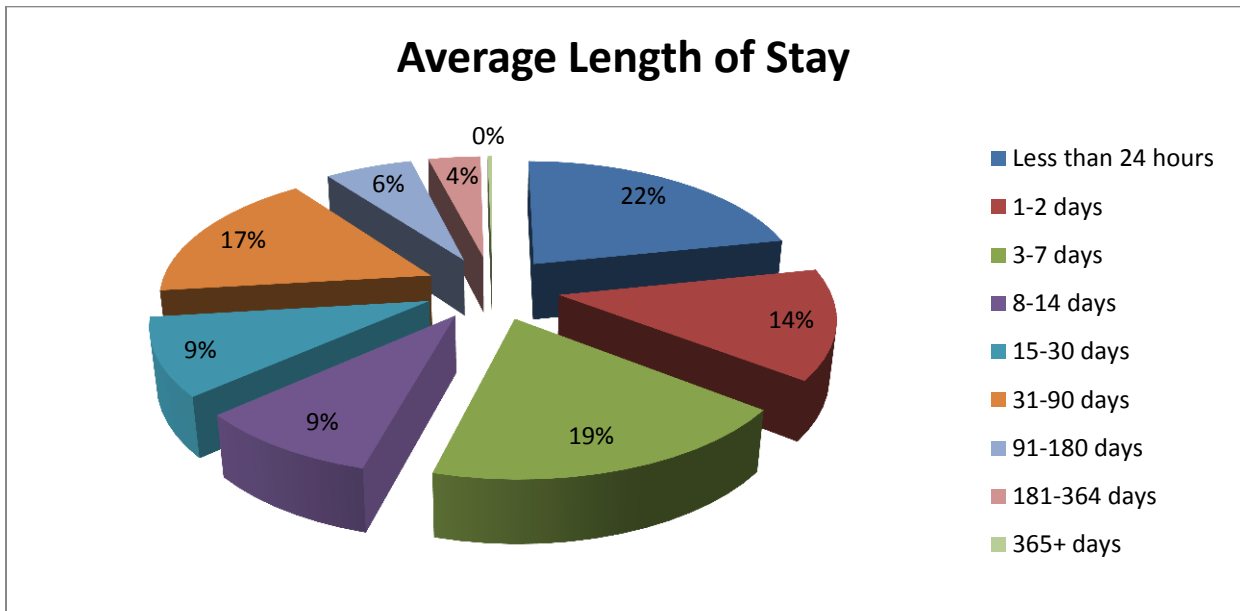


Time in Custody at Release - Females	2011	2012	2013
Less than 24 hours	61	55	68
1 - 2 days	31	36	40
3 - 7 days	41	43	38
8 - 14 days	18	19	15
15 - 30 days	20	16	21
31 - 45 days	19	22	42
91 - 180 days	10	13	7
181 - 365 days	6	5	1
1 year +	1	1	0

Average Length of Stay - Females



Time in Custody at Release - Total	2011	2012	2013
Less than 24 hours	340	184	524
1 - 2 days	224	107	331
3 - 7 days	330	122	452
8 - 14 days	171	52	223
15 - 30 days	176	57	233
31 - 45 days	321	83	404
91 - 180 days	119	30	149
181 - 365 days	77	12	89
1 year +	5	2	7



- g. We see that 36 percent of the inmate population stays two days or less in custody. This reflects a high level of turnover of the inmate population on a regular basis. This short term stay significantly impacts booking and release operations within the jail. Separating the male and female inmate population we see some variances in the amount of time spent in custody. 28% of the females released spent less than 24 hours in custody compared to 19% of the male population. Also 44% of the females were released within two days whereas only 32% of the male inmate population was released within the same period of time. Finally, 63% of the female population was released within 7 days after incarceration compared to only 55% of the male population.
- h. The following data provides inmates by category incarcerated in the facility each month covering the period of January 2011 through April 2013. Although the majority of categories reflect a fairly consistent population there is two areas that should be pointed out. First, we note a significant increase in the numbers of convicted misdemeanors in custody in 2013. Secondly, reviewing the average of pretrial misdemeanors in jail

custody statewide indicates a higher percentage in custody in Blount County during calendar years 2012 and 2013. The Statewide calendar year averages compared to Blount County are 2011: state average 14.2% versus Blount County at 13.6%; 2012: statewide 12.9% versus Blount County at 14.9%; and 2013: statewide 12.9% versus Blount County at 14.2%.

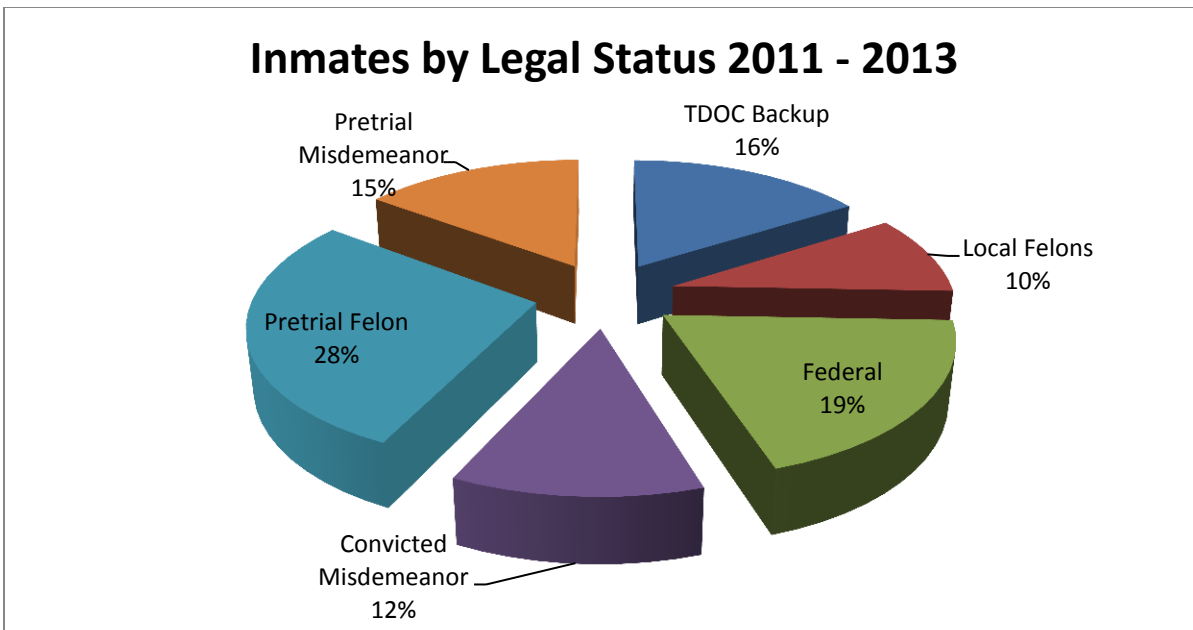
2013	TDOC Backup	Local Felons	Federal	Convicted Misdemeanor	Pretrial Felon	Pretrial Misdemeanor	Total
January	84	59	110	67	153	76	549
February	86	59	104	75	141	84	549
March	72	53	123	79	147	75	549
April	78	61	103	68	127	71	508
May	77	50	104	74	122	78	505
Average	79	56	109	73	138	77	532

2012	TDOC Backup	Local Felons	Federal	Convicted Misdemeanor	Pretrial Felon	Pretrial Misdemeanor	Total
January	90	45	75	45	139	81	475
February	90	53	86	50	146	69	494
March	85	54	100	56	131	71	497
April	85	54	95	55	142	77	507
May	90	55	89	55	174	86	547
June	90	54	96	52	175	85	552
July	98	65	109	83	149	74	578
August	86	60	100	76	157	77	556
September	92	56	92	73	177	57	547
October	94	46	93	44	187	87	551
November	88	56	98	61	166	103	572
December	104	64	80	33	151	97	529
Average	91	50	94	57	158	80	534

2011	TDOC Backup	Local Felons	Federal	Convicted Misdemeanor	Pretrial Felon	Pretrial Misdemeanor	Total
January	66	37	119	49	130	69	470
February	72	32	110	50	135	63	462
March	64	39	101	58	142	63	467
April	76	37	119	65	134	63	494
May	70	36	101	57	145	89	498
June	56	35	107	59	138	69	464
July	66	32	94	58	130	81	461
August	76	40	78	59	126	71	450
September	80	43	77	56	134	79	468
October	91	41	87	54	136	73	483
November	95	49	94	46	128	73	484
December	97	51	75	43	119	66	451
Average	76	39	97	55	133	72	471

- i. The following graph provides an average by inmate legal status covering the period of January 2011 through April 2013. It reflects that 65% of the population are inmates that the county is required to house. Another 16%

of the population is TDOC backup inmates which are inmates arrested of a crime and convicted of the crime in Blount County. In other words they are your inmates. Due to the lack of bed space availability in the Department of Corrections they are held in your facility.



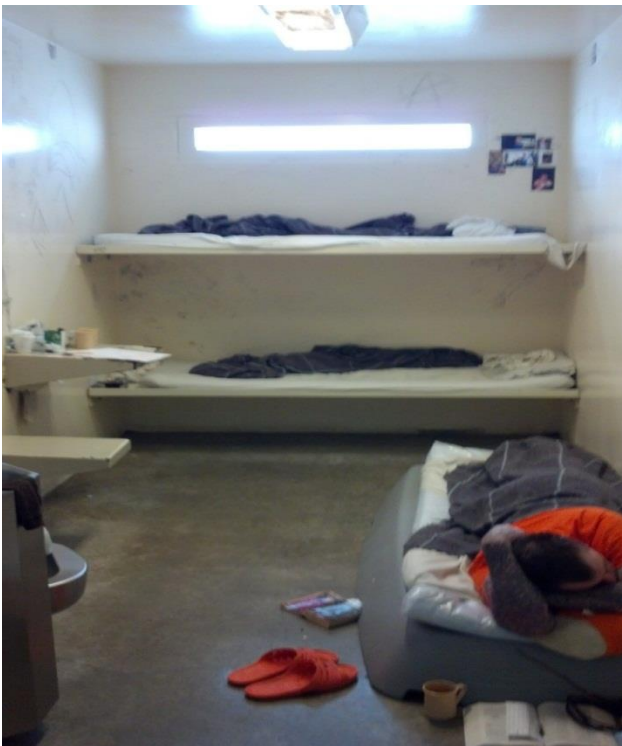
- j. Two other areas that must be considered as the County thinks about inmate population projections. First, there are currently 1,800 persons currently on active county probation. At any point in time during their probationary period they are subject to incarceration as a result of technical rule violations or the incurring of a new criminal charge. Secondly, the Sheriff's Office has 5,000 outstanding criminal warrants. The Sheriff's Office could initiate "round-ups" where a focused law enforcement effort to bring these persons into custody could occur and in other instances during routine traffic stops or other type of routine law enforcement encounters persons are identified with a warrant and taken into custody. Either of these (probation violators or criminal warrants) could have a significant impact on jail crowding.

III. JAIL PHYSICAL PLANT

- a. An example of inmate housing capacity versus actual inmates' assigned to housing units on April 23, 2013 is shown in the following table.

Housing	Inmate Count	Housing Capacity	Classification Designation	% of Capacity
D-1	47	32	Medium	147%
D-2	42	32	Medium	131%
D-3	42	32	Medium	131%
D-4	42	32	Medium	131%
D-5	39	32	Maximum	122%
D-6	39	32	Maximum	122%
Sub Total	251	192		131%
C-1	51	32	Female Maximum	159%
C-2	47	32	Female Minimum	147%
C-3	32	16	Special Maximum	200%
C-4	35	24	Minimum Male	146%
C-5	37	24	Minimum Male	154%
C-6	41	24	Minimum Male	171%
C-7	8	6	Isolation Maximum	133%
Medical	11			
Intake	6			
Sub Total	268	158		159%
TOTAL	519	350		148%

- b. The actual counts in each housing area clearly indicate significant crowding conditions in the facility. The jail is using temporary beds in dayrooms and triple bunking cells throughout the facility. Due to crowding conditions there are insufficient showers, commodes, and sinks. The following photographs provide some examples of the impact of jail crowding in this facility.





- c. The county has considered “triple bunking” cells. The current physical plant and operations will not support this.
 - i. Speaking with the Tennessee Corrections Institute, there is insufficient square footage in the cell to accomplish this. Based on the amount of time inmates are locked down in cells they cannot achieve the minimum requirement of 35 square feet per inmate.
 - ii. Another challenge with increasing to three persons per cell is that the dayrooms will not meet minimum square footage requirements (35 square feet per inmate).

- iii. A third shower would be required to be installed in each housing area.
- d. There were some concerns observed regarding support areas in the facility.
 - i. Food service storage is insufficient to handle the current inmate population.
 - ii. Speaking with food service staff indicates that the current food service equipment is insufficient to handle the current inmate population. They indicated that they have to regularly cook each meal twice as the equipment is insufficient to prepare at one time for the entire population.
 - iii. Inmate visitation is a manpower intensive process requiring extensive movement of inmates to unsupervised visitation areas. Inmates have to move through programs rooms to access visitation which is disruptive to the program providers.
 - iv. There is only one handicapped visitation booth for the entire facility.
- e. Operational challenges that the jail is experiencing due to crowded conditions include:
 - i. Excessive locking down of inmates inside cells. This is done due to the frequency of inmate altercations when numerous inmates access the dayroom at one time. This decision was made by jail leadership to enhance safety and security of inmates and staff.
 - ii. The ability to classify (and separate) inmates by risk and need is non-existent in this facility. This has the potential to expose the county to costly litigation over failure to protect allegations.
 - iii. Due to crowding inmates with special needs are being housed in the booking and intake area in holding cells not designed for long term housing.
 - iv. Maximum security inmates are permitted outside their cells only one hour per day. To ensure safety and security of the facility, staff, and inmates, multiple dayrooms are used to accomplish this task. This is a manpower extensive process. Further it mixes maximum custody inmates with minimum (non-violent) inmates further exposing the county to potential liability.
 - v. There are six single cells in isolation maximum security. Due to the nature of the inmates housed in this area they can only come out of their cells one at a time. Due to this constraint, the jail is unable to comply with state standards mandating a minimum of 14 hours outside of cells each day, or, have cells with a minimum of 70 square feet of unencumbered square feet.

IV. POPULATION PROJECTIONS

- a. One final area that was evaluated in this analysis was the inmate population projections. Census information indicates that the 2010

population of Blount County was 123,010 which was an increase of 16.24% from the documented 105,823 Blount residents in the 2000 census. The 2012 estimation was 124,177. Using only the growth rate between the years of 2010 (actual census) and 2012 (estimated), reflects an approximate increase of 584 citizens each year. I used these figures to make basic population projections. While these are a best guess projection, it clearly indicates continued growth in Blount County.

Year	County Population	Potential Average Daily Inmate Population	Incarceration Rate	ADP Minus Federal Inmates
2009	121,804	425	3.849	287
2010	123,010	393	3.195	301
2011	123,594	471	3.811	364
2012	124,177	534	4.3	447
2013	124,761	539	4.32	429
2014	125,345	488	3.895	381
2015	125,929	490	3.895	383
2016	126,513	493	3.895	386
2017	127,097	495	3.895	388
2018	127,681	497	3.895	390
2019	128,265	500	3.895	393
2020	128,849	502	3.895	395

- b. The table above reflects some basic information regarding county population (obtained from the Tennessee State Data Center) and the average daily population (ADP) from actual data provided by the jail regarding the 2009 through 2012 average daily population and the Department of Corrections Jail Summary Reports. The incarceration rate was calculated by dividing the ADP by the county population. I used an incarceration rate of 3.895 (average of 2009 through 2013) for the years 2014 and out. I also used average daily population data provided regarding federal inmates for the period covering 2009 through 2012 and the department of corrections jail summary reports for 2013 (January through April). The average of those years was 107 federal inmates. I subtracted the actual (2009 – 2013) and the average (2014 – 2020) of federal inmates from the potential average daily population. Even using these projections, the jail remains in a crowded condition.
- c. Other areas to consider in determining bed space requirements. They included future ADP projections, peaking, and classification.
 - i. The peaking factor accounts for situations when the ADP exceeds the average. I evaluated three different months June

2011, May 2012, and March 2013 and determined that the average peak was 2.33% higher than the average daily population.

- ii. A jail’s classification system provides for the jail to separate offenders based on need and risk. A critical factor in determining bed space needs is the ability to properly classify and separate offenders by identified risks and needs. An accepted classification and peaking consideration is that the jail reaches its capacity when the average daily population is at approximately 90% of its’ rated capacity.
- iii. Taking into consideration these two factors, the following table provides projected inmate population bed space requirements.

Capacity Factors	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Potential Base ADP Forecast	539	488	490	493	495	497	500	502
Peaking Factor (2.33%)	13	11	11	11	12	12	12	12
Classification Factor (10%)	54	49	49	49	50	50	50	50
Total Bed Estimated Space Requirements	606	548	550	553	557	559	562	564

- d. Calculating accurate population projections is difficult at best. Given the additional factors provided in Blount County regarding the decision to contract with the state and U.S. Marshals to house inmate’s further challenges accurate projections. During the April 2013 meeting it was noted that Blount County is reimbursed \$58.50 per day for the housing of Federal inmates (approximately \$1.8 million annually) and \$37.00 per day for housing state inmates (another \$1.2 million annually). As part of reducing “discretionary” inmate populations, Blount County must also consider the approximate \$3 million annual revenue generated.
- e. I reviewed a document published by the U.S. Department of Justice “Building Community Support for New Jail Construction”. While it addresses several issues I found a couple points to consider when gathering information and assessing the need. The document points out, what we know, are that jails are expensive build as well as operate, and that few jails are built without exploring other ways of solving a local jurisdiction’s problem. The document points out those jurisdictions build jails for three reasons:
 - i. The existing jail is damaged, worn out, or no longer suitable for housing inmates.
 - ii. The existing jail no longer meets the jurisdiction’s need. For example, the facility is crowded – such as the case in Blount County.

- iii. The existing building cannot be operated efficiently and the design does not provide for effective inmate supervision or classification – again such as the case in Blount County.
- f. Part of the jail crowding stems from the decision to house state and federal (discretionary) inmates.

V. CONCLUSION

- a. The existing facility was designed for future pod expansion.
- b. I commend the Sheriff's Office for operating a clean and professional jail. However, staff is continuously challenged due to extreme crowding conditions. Concerns over the absence of an adequate classification system and housing plan expose the county to potential liability.
- c. Evaluate the pretrial and sentenced misdemeanant population for reasons of increases. As part of that evaluation determine if there are options for pretrial diversion or alternative sentencing.
- d. There is a need for expansion based on the housing of state and federal inmates. By reducing the cap on the number of state and federal inmates held at the Blount County Jail reduces bed space needs. However, additional beds are required (particularly for female inmates) at this time.
- e. In addition to considering expanding the current facility, I would suggest that the support areas (food service, laundry, medical, and visitation areas be evaluated for expansion/modification). Additionally, evaluate the need for additional single person (special needs) housing.
- f. Although there is a need for additional bed space and Blount County has a history of generating revenue with the housing of state and federal inmates, I would offer caution to fund new construction costs and the associated operational costs solely based on the continued or even potential for increased revenue generated by the housing of state and federal inmates.