



HF 2936
March 2, 2026

Chairs Novotny and Moller and members of the committee,

The Minnesota Justice Research Center writes to express concerns on HF 2936.

The Department of Corrections oversight of county jails is critical to ensuring constitutional, humane treatment of incarcerated individuals and securing dignified working conditions for correctional staff. When done properly, routine inspections can prevent abuse and neglect, hold officials accountable, and identify issues before they lead to injuries, deaths, and costly settlements.

Minnesota has witnessed far too many needless deaths in Minnesota jails. In 2020, KARE 11 reported that “inspectors for the Minnesota Department of Corrections (DOC) have repeatedly failed to identify failures at county jails that contributed to inmate deaths. Even when problems have been identified, records show the DOC has often failed to force local jails to make corrections.”¹

Due to prodding from the public and legislators, the Department of Corrections has made progress to improve oversight of county jails. Now is not the time to roll this back.

Unfortunately, jails have become the de facto solution for too many societal problems. As the “Minnesota Regional/County Jails Consolidation or Merger Study” from 2024 revealed, jailers are facing difficult challenges. Survey responses showed that 68% of jails reported that over 30% of their population experiences mental health issues and 82% of jails reported that over 30% of their population struggles with substance use.²

In the words of the Ombuds of Corrections, far too many Minnesotans needing mental health treatment are “languishing in jails.”³ Instead of reducing regulation, we need lawmakers to come together and expand options for mental health and substance abuse issues.

¹<https://www.kare11.com/article/news/investigations/kare-11-investigates-flawed-often-toothless-jail-death-investigations/89-0255d498-8679-4961-959a-6f19c4a9e040>

²https://mn.gov/doc/assets/MN%20Regional%20County%20Jails%20Consolidation%20Study%20Final%20Report%2012.20.24_tcm1089-669829.pdf

³ https://mn.gov/obfc/assets/Languishing-Behind-Bars-Report-July-2025_tcm1157-693740.pdf

For years, county sheriffs have been stating that they do not want jails to become the “new asylums.”⁴ Together, we can create a comprehensive system for mental health care and substance abuse, lessen the reliance on incarceration, and continue to ensure that jails are safe for inmates and staff.

-Will Cooley, Policy Director, Minnesota Justice Research Center

⁴ <https://www.cbsnews.com/minnesota/news/sheriffs-jails-mental-illness/>