



Minnesota Regional & County Jails Consolidation Study

House Capital Investment Committee

Tuesday, April 7, 2026

Context

- Minnesota has **77 county operated jails and 2 regionally operated**
- Many county jails are approaching or exceeding their typical **30-year life expectancy**
- Estimated cost for a 40-bed facility: **roughly \$32 million.**
- Many counties are considering major renovation or new construction projects
- Since 2020, **over \$20 million in state bonding funds** for local jail projects

Age of Current Facilities (as of 2024)			
Carlton County	<1 year	Scott County	18 years
Itasca County	<1 year	Wilkin County	18 years
Winona County	1 year	Freebom County	20 years
Becker County	5 years	Steele County	20 Years
Clay County	5 years	Nobles County	22 Years
Le Sueur County	5 years	Yellow Medicine County	22 years
Chisago County	6 years	Kandiyohi County	23 years
Pennington County	7 years	Lincoln County	23 years
Kanabec County	12 years	Ramsey County	23 years
Roseau County	12 years	Hennepin County	24 years
Houston County	13 years	Goodhue County	25 years
Mower County	13 years	Clearwater County	26 years
Douglas County	14 years	Cook County	26 years
Lyon County	14 years	Nicollet County	27 years
Wright County	14 years	Benton County	28 years
Blue Earth County	15 years	Lake County	28 years
Faribault County	15 Years	Carver County	30 years
Renville County	15 Years	Koochiching County	30 years
Wabasha County	15 years	Saint Louis County	30 years
Lyon County	15 years	Sibley County	30 years
Polk County	16 Years	Cottonwood County	31 years
Crow Wing County	17 years	Washington County	31 years
Pine County	17 Years	Olmsted County	33 years
Traverse County	17 years	Beltrami County	35 years
Hubbard County	18 years	Dakota County	36 years
		Brown County	37 years
		Cass County	37 years
		Otter Tail County	37 years
		Swift County	39 years
		Isanti County	40 years
		Aitkin County	40 years
		Lake of the Woods County	40 years
		Sherburne County	40 years
		Wadena County	40 years
		Chippewa County	41 years
		Kittson County	41 Years
		Redwood County	41 years
		McLeod County	42 years
		Anoka County	42 years
		Watonwan County	43 years
		Murray County	45 years
		Pipestone County	45 years
		Jackson County	48 years
		Rice County	49 Years
		Marshall County	50 years
		Martin County	50 years
		Mille Lacs County	50 years
		Meeker County	50 years
		Waseca County	54 years
		Fillmore County	55 years

- As required by Minn. Session Law, Chapter 52, Article 11, Section 33, final report submitted January 2025
- DOC contracted with “Justice Planners”
- Analysis Included:
 - 2019-2024 jail population data and historical analysis
 - Facility ages, local crime rates, demographic trends
 - Developed forecasting model to create projections through 2049
 - Surveys for county stakeholders
- Limitations:
 - Survey distribution method limited participation and representativeness
 - DOC sent out follow-up survey to better reflect broader group of elected officials



Minnesota Jail Overview

- Minnesota's correctional system relies heavily on **locally operated county jails** rather than large regional detention systems.
- Capacity and demand are **uneven across the state.**
 - Overall, rural counties are declining in jail population while suburban and urban counties are increasing.
- Some counties spend hundreds of thousands of dollars annually **housing incarcerated persons elsewhere** when local capacity is insufficient.
- In other areas, beds remain unused for long periods, meaning counties pay for 24/7 facilities that are underutilized.

Population Trends

- 13 counties will likely **exceed their current operational capacity** by 2049
- Major demand drivers include:
 - Population growth in certain regions
 - Court processing delays
 - Probation or supervised release violations
 - Mental & behavioral health needs



Mental and Behavioral Health Needs

- A significant share of individuals in jails have mental health or substance use disorders, which can increase jail stays if treatment alternatives are unavailable.
 - 68% of jails report that over 30% of their population has **mental health needs**
 - 82% of jails report that over 30% of their population has **substance use needs**
- Disaggregated data from facilities is limited
 - Mental health diagnoses of those in population
 - Levels of care required and specialized services needed
 - Length of stay and ability to provide meaningful intervention

Stakeholder Survey Findings

Study surveyed several stakeholder groups to **evaluate support for consolidation**

- Sheriffs, jail administrators, county attorneys, county commissioners, and police chiefs
- Data limited to who responded to survey

Key **themes**:

1. Strong preference for **local control/efficiency**
2. Interest in **voluntary** regional collaboration
3. **Concerns about practicality** and travel distance for courts, access to family, and legal counsel

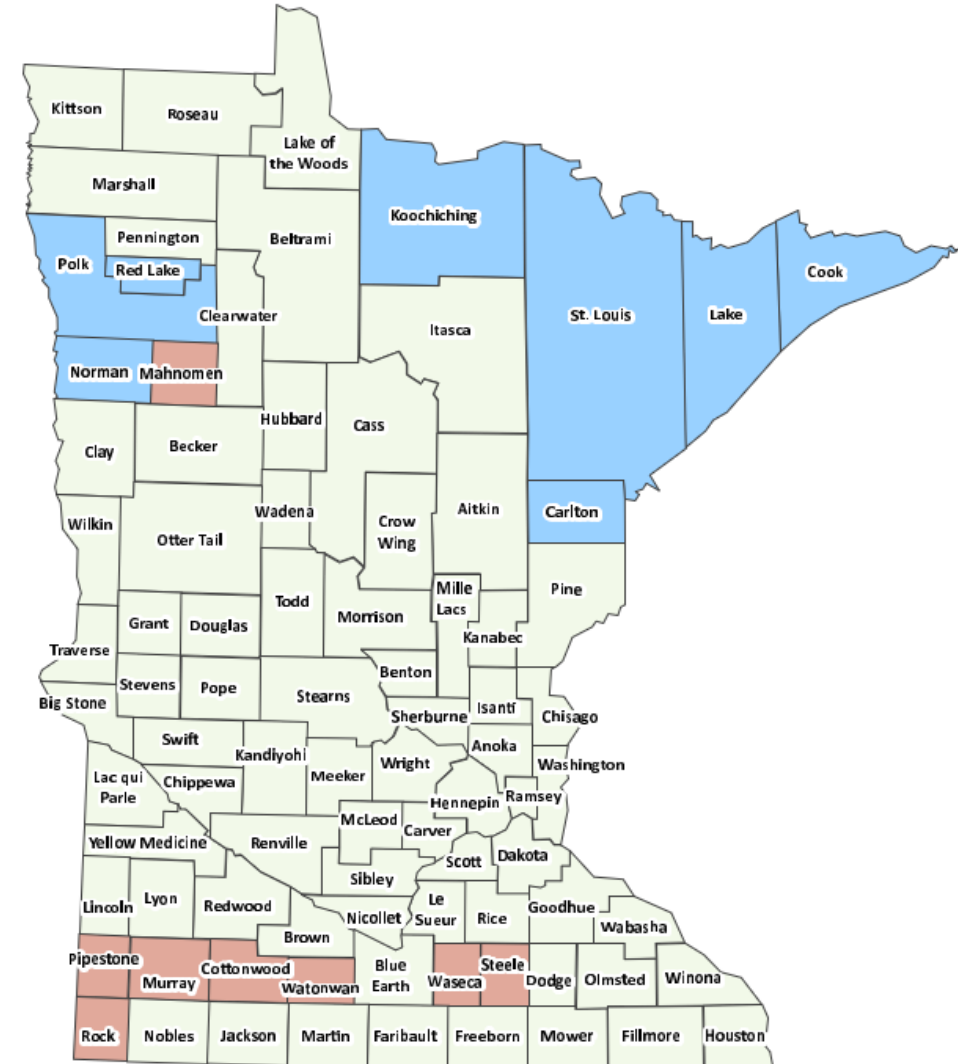
Regional Jail Models

Two state regional models exist and provide useful examples:

- Northeast Regional Corrections Center (Carlton, Cook, St. Louis, Koochiching, and Lake Counties)
- Northwest Regional Corrections Center (Polk, Norman, and Red Lake Counties)

The report highlighted **three potential opportunities** for regionalization:

- Mahnomen County & Northwest Regional Correctional Center
 - Mahnomen jail could benefit from joining
- Steele & Waseca Counties
 - Complementary resources and needs
 - Steele is a newer facility, and Waseca is one of the oldest
- Rock, Pipestone, Murray, Cottonwood, and Watonwan County
 - Logistical challenges, but projected population numbers support regional approach



Benefits to Regional Model

Shared operational and capital costs

- Large capital investments for facilities difficult to sustain

Maximizing the **use of bed space**

- System efficiencies increase costs across counties
- Increasing operational cost for 24/7 facility unsustainable when minimally populated

Potential improvement for **staffing and resources**

- Including correctional officers, medical staff, and behavioral health staff
- Enhanced ability to offer specialized programming and services



Strategic Considerations for Counties

- **Increased transportation requirements** for court, medical visits, and family visitation.
- Need for significant investment in technology (e.g., video court platforms).
- Managing schedules across multiple jurisdictions increases the need for administrative coordination.
- Regional models require **strong local partnerships and governance agreements**.
 - Agreements must distribute fixed and variable costs fairly. May need to adjust contributions as facility use changes.



Report Recommendations to Legislature

1. Encourage voluntary regional partnerships

- Planning grants, technical assistance, and incentives for shared facilities

2. Integrate regional considerations into state capital investment/tax relief evaluations

- Require counties requesting state capital investments/tax relief (on material costs) to explore potential regional partnerships or alternatives for meeting special population needs

3. Expand treatment and alternatives to jail for behavioral health needs

- These populations account for a significant portion of jail admissions

4. Support statewide jail data and planning

- Better statewide monitoring of jail capacity, facility age, conditions, maintenance costs and deferred maintenance, special populations needs planning and county capacity to guide future decisions

Further Considerations

Does it make long-term financial and operational sense for 77 counties to maintain jail facilities in Minnesota?

- Local counties must make decisions through the lens of differing priorities
 - Operational efficiency and convenience of a local facility
 - Costs – operational, debt costs, maintenance costs
 - Workflow changes and governance in regional models

Counties must evaluate:

- Whether local jail facilities are sustainable based on population trends, population needs, and costs
- Existence of potential or opportunities for regional collaboration
- Implications of bonding debt on local levy, operational costs of facility, overhead costs regardless of facility population, facility maintenance and upkeep, and the cost procured services (medical, mental health, etc.)

Acknowledgements

The DOC appreciates the participation and voice of stakeholders:

- Minnesota Sheriff's Association
- County Sheriffs
- Jail Administrators
- County Attorneys
- County Commissioners
- Local Police Chiefs
- Others

Questions?