



JEAN PETERS BAKER

Jackson County Prosecuting Attorney

June 4, 2018

Dear Chairman Burnett and fellow Jackson County Legislators:

The purpose of my letter is to address a stubborn problem regarding oversight of the Jackson County Detention Center (jail). As the Jackson County Prosecutor, I have a duty to every individual placed in the jail by law enforcement to ensure they are treated as individuals with constitutional rights.

As the Jackson County Legislature, I fully acknowledge that you do not run the jail. I am writing, however, to urge you to take a greater leadership role. The jail is in crisis. This is not new. It remains one of the most serious problems facing this County.

You showed courage in hiring a credible auditor to assess this jail. Mr. Rowenhorst's report identified issues inside the facility to which only those who go inside the facility could know. You approved the hiring of HOK to provide a physical facility audit. You also have approved every expenditure asked on behalf of the jail and yet, more is needed.

Citizens of Jackson County served on two separate Grand Juries authorized by the Circuit Court and they produced a 71 page report. They detailed their key findings of:

- Failure to manage funding;
- Failure to plan for safety and security; and
- Failure to clean and maintain.

The Grand Jurors not only detailed their findings – they also made recommendations to help resolve some of these issues. In their report, they “urge the Jail, County Administration and County Legislature to work cohesively without animus.” It was disheartening then to read the County Executive's statement attacking “my report”. This is most certainly not the Prosecutor's Report. Perhaps most discouraging is the response by the County Administration to the Grand Jury report is to seek to find errors in the final report, rather than to solve problems.

The County Executive reports 754 beds are available for state level offenses (including probation violators, bail jumpers, those held for extradition and those awaiting trial). The County Executive reports that today, 864 inmates are actually held in the jail. My office is forced, along with every judge in this circuit to find ways to lower the number of people incarcerated before trial. Enormous pressure is placed on us to release inmates simply due to crowding in the jail.

The next most likely step regarding this jail is a federal consent decree because changes and improvements in the jail management have been so slow. For the good of Jackson County, it is time to fill the leadership void and make changes that will improve the way this jail is run.

I am asking that you transfer administration of this jail from the County Executive to the County Sheriff.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jean Peters Baker". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jean Peters Baker
Prosecutor for Jackson County

cc: County Executive Frank White