

A Review of Salt Lake County's Criminal Justice System

Strengthening Oversight and
Coordination for Repeat Criminal Offenders

Office of the Legislative
Auditor General

Report to the UTAH LEGISLATURE



LEGISLATIVE AUDITOR GENERAL



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December 9, 2025

TO: THE UTAH STATE LEGISLATURE

Transmitted herewith is our report:

“A Review of Salt Lake County’s Criminal Justice System – Strengthening Oversight and Coordination for Repeat Criminal Offenders” [Report #2025-32].

An audit summary is found at the front of the report. The scope and objectives of the audit are included in the audit summary.

We will be happy to meet with appropriate legislative committees, individual legislators, and other state officials to discuss any item contained in the report in order to facilitate the implementation of the recommendations.

Sincerely,

Kade R. Minchey, CIA, CFE

Auditor General

kminchey@le.utah.gov



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CAPSTONE REPORT

AUDIT REQUEST

In November 2024, the Legislative Audit Subcommittee prioritized audits of police departments and county attorney offices, including those in Salt Lake County. The scope was later expanded to include audits into the Salt Lake County Jail and the Utah State Court system. This report serves as a supplemental capstone, addressing broader criminal justice system issues rather than entity-specific concerns.

BACKGROUND

This capstone report found fragmented coordination among Salt Lake County's independently elected leaders, leading to accountability gaps for repeat criminal offenders. It provides recommendations for the Legislature to consider to improve oversight, coordination, and strategies to reduce recidivism while maintaining accountability.

A REVIEW OF SALT LAKE COUNTY'S CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM



KEY FINDINGS

- ✓ The Legislature Should Consider Strengthening Coordination for Criminal Justice Systems in Statute
- ✓ Salt Lake County Leaders' Fragmented Coordination Has Caused Accountability Gaps for Repeat Offenders
- ✓ A Dual Approach to Criminal Justice Can Include Both Recidivism-Reducing Programs and Traditional Accountability Mechanisms for Repeat Offenders



RECOMMENDATION

- ✓ The Legislature should consider amending statute to require counties to performance metrics to evaluate the effectiveness of recidivism-reducing programs. Counties could report these metrics in their strategic plans, helping to demonstrate if programs are working as intended.
- ✓ The Legislature should consider amending statute to require counties to establish a dual-track approach to criminal justice. This could include statutory language to require counties to consider traditional methods, such as ensuring adequate jail capacity, as part of their plan. This dual focus can improve accountability for repeat offenders in the criminal justice system.

REPORT SUMMARY

A Singular Focus on Support Services May Overlook Accountability for Some Repeat Criminal Offenders

Salt Lake County's primary criminal justice strategy focuses on reducing recidivism among repeat offenders with underlying issues like homelessness and behavioral health challenges. We acknowledge the importance of programs designed to address these areas. Even so, we believe they should be paired with traditional enforcement mechanisms – such as incarceration – to ensure accountability for repeated offenders.

A dual approach focusing on both support systems and incarceration can improve the accountability for repeat offenders.

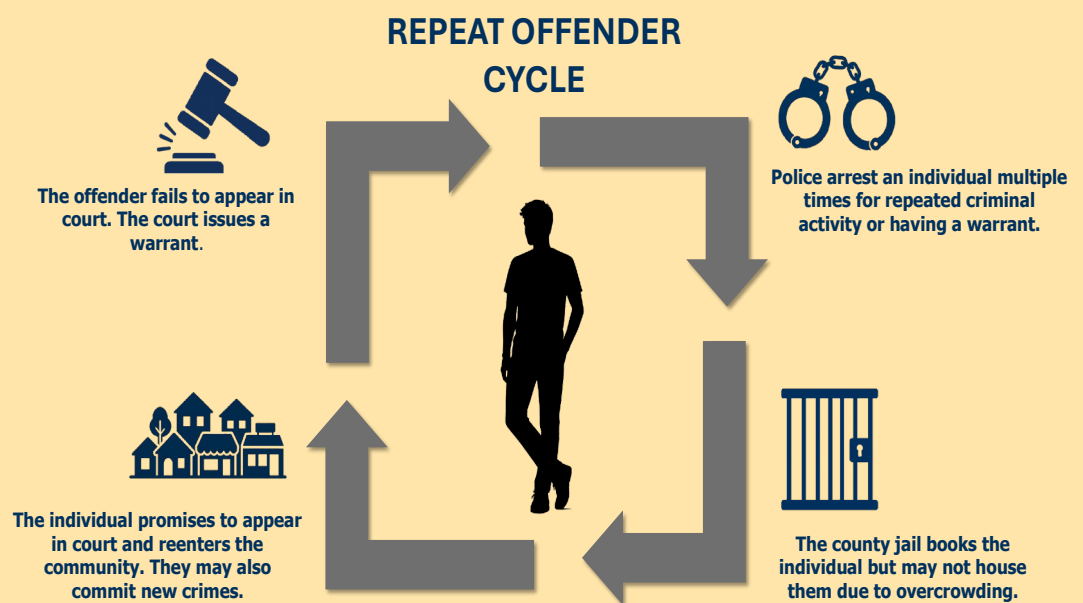
There Is Not a Strong Oversight Model Requiring Coordination Among the Independent Entities

Breakdowns in accountability for repeat offenders stem largely from the independent operations of the entities within the county's criminal justice system. Each group is led by separately elected officials. Repeat offenders touch all areas of the county's criminal justice system. They place a high burden on police, prosecutors, and the county jail due to their repeated entry into the system. There is little systemwide oversight to coordinate each role within the criminal justice system.

As a result, gaps begin to show when the priorities of the different entities do not align.

Fragmented Coordination Has Caused Accountability Gaps for Repeat Offenders

Repeat offenders touch all areas of the county's criminal justice system. They place a high burden on police, prosecutors, and the county jail due to their repeated entry into the system. The following graphic details the cycle of repeat offenders in the criminal justice system.





The Legislature Should Consider Strengthening Coordination for Criminal Justice Systems in Statute

The criminal justice system in Salt Lake County doesn't have a coordinated strategy to identify and address repeat criminal offenders. There is little systemwide oversight to manage coordination between the different county leaders. As a result, there may be little accountability for repeat criminal offenders. The Legislature could enhance oversight by strengthening existing statutes for county coordinating councils to improve coordination in all areas of criminal justice, including repeat offenders. This could include a dual approach that prioritizes both alternative-to-incarceration programs and traditional accountability measures.

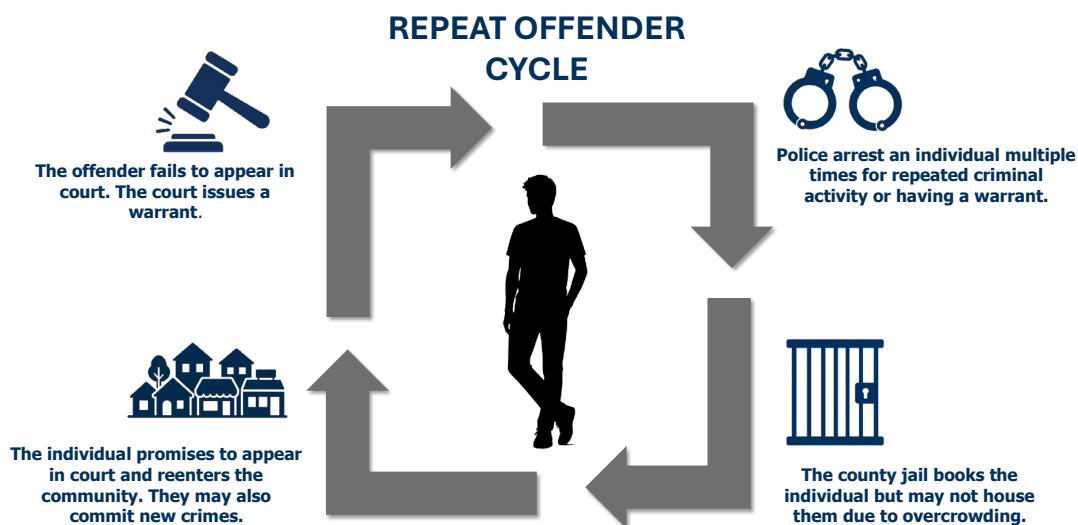
This brief report is meant to provide potential improvements to Salt Lake County's coordination efforts on repeat criminal offenders. We have released three companion reports that contain additional details into each organization. A report on the Utah State Court System is forthcoming in 2026.



Salt Lake County Leaders' Fragmented Coordination Has Caused Accountability Gaps for Repeat Offenders

Leaders within the county's criminal justice system have not adequately coordinated to identify and address repeat offenders. Repeat offenders touch all areas of the county's criminal justice system. They place a high burden on police, prosecutors, and the county jail due to their repeated entry into the system. The

following graphic details the cycle of repeat offenders in the criminal justice system.



Statute does not allow the release of a repeat offender if they have been arrested and booked into jail twice or more in a 12-month period.¹ We conducted an analysis of jail booking data and found that there are thousands of these repeat offenders in Salt Lake County’s criminal justice system.² The following figure shows the number of offenders who have been booked into jail between June 1, 2024, and May 31, 2025, who had a prior booking within 12 months.

Figure 1.1 There were over 7,600 Individuals Booked into Jail Twice or More in a 12-Month Period. These repeat offenders were often released because of jail overcrowding.

Jail Bookings Between June 1, 2024, and May 31, 2025	
Unique Individuals Booked into Jail	19,846
Number of Individuals with a Prior Booking within 12 Months	7,661

Source: Auditor generated from Salt Lake County Jail data.

¹ **Utah Code** 17-22-5.5 (4)(e)—The Legislature set this requirement in House Bill 312 in the 2025 General Legislative Session.

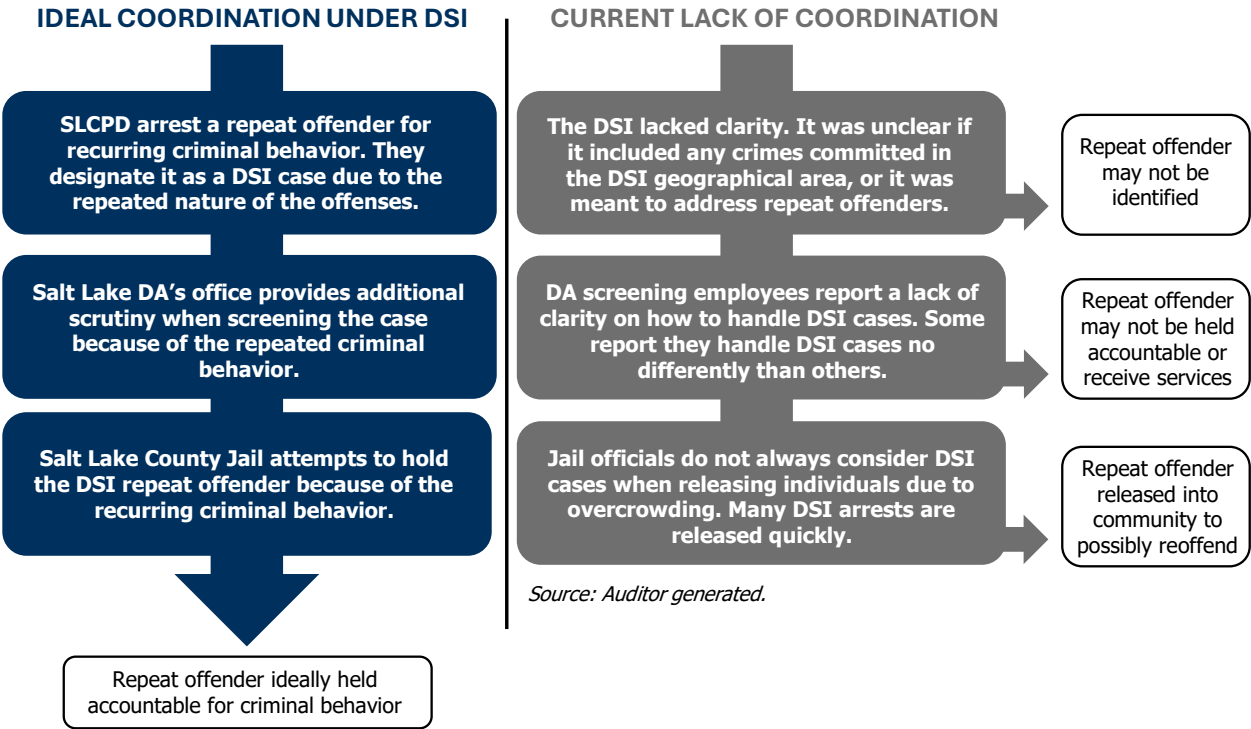
² Many repeat offenders commit additional crimes or fail to appear in court after being released from jail. For more information, see “A Performance Audit of the Salt Lake County Jail” (#2025-30).



Salt Lake County leaders have approached the issue of repeat offenders with differing priorities. Some entities within the county have made efforts to track certain repeat offenders through the system, while others didn't. This inconsistency has resulted in accountability gaps for repeat offenders as they fall through the cracks of the system.

For example, the Salt Lake City Police Department (SLCPD) created a Downtown Safety Initiative (DSI) in 2024 focused on addressing repeat offenders within the transient population in the city. The District Attorney's (DA) screening team was meant to provide a more thorough examination of these DSI cases for aggressive prosecution. In turn, the jail was to attempt to hold DSI repeat offenders rather than release them due to overcrowding. However, the different players did not fully coordinate to ensure they had shared expectations for the DSI. This is seen in the following figure.

Some entities have made efforts to track certain repeat offenders, while others did not. This inconsistency has resulted in accountability gaps for repeat offenders.



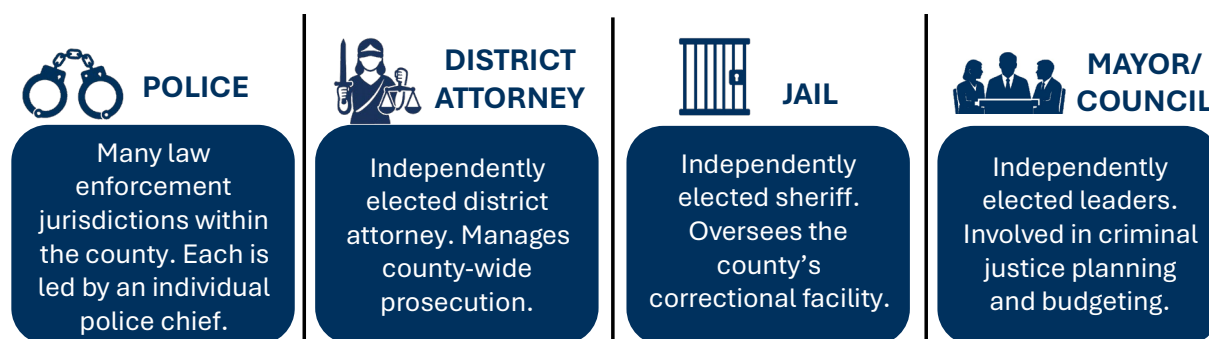
As an example of a repeat offender falling through the cracks, one individual accumulated 88 warrants and 130 distinct criminal charges in 2025—many relating to theft. During this time, the DA's office did not pursue enhancements for these repeated theft charges.³ The jail released the offender 12 times in 2025

³ See "A Performance Audit of the Salt Lake County District Attorney's Office" (#2025-31), page 11.

due to overcrowding. These repeated releases led to additional offenses and encounters with law enforcement officers. Such breakdowns in coordination allow repeat offenders to avoid meaningful accountability.

There Is Not a Strong Oversight Model Requiring Coordination Among the Independent Entities

Breakdowns in accountability for repeat offenders stem largely from the independent operations of the entities within the county's criminal justice system. Each group is led by separately elected officials. There is little systemwide oversight to coordinate each role within the criminal justice system. As a result, gaps begin to show when the priorities of the different entities do not align. Below is a graphic showing the independent roles within county criminal justice systems.



Source: Auditor generated.

State statute provides some oversight by requiring counties to have criminal justice coordinating councils (CJCCs). These councils collaborate on criminal justice matters and develop a strategic plan.⁴ However, statute offers limited direction regarding which components of the broader criminal justice system councils should focus on or evaluate. To enhance oversight, the Legislature could require counties to use performance metrics to evaluate recidivism-reducing programs and consider other traditional methods to hold repeat offenders accountable. Each area is covered in more detail in the following sections.

⁴ **Utah Code** 17-55-201. These councils include the sheriff, a member of the county council, the county attorney, defense council, one municipal police chief, a district court judge, and a justice court judge. More information on CJCCs is found in "A Performance Audit of the Salt Lake County District Attorney's Office" (#2025-30), page 38.



Statute Could Require Counties to Evaluate and Report on Program Outcomes

In 2023, the Legislature made CJCCs mandatory for all counties. Some of the main conditions of the law require a county to:

- Develop and implement a strategic plan
- Map all systems, resources, assets, and services within the county's criminal justice system
- Plan for data sharing across the county's criminal justice system
- Establish objectives for reducing recidivism



Without measures showing the effectiveness of programs meant to reduce recidivism, it is unclear if they are working as intended.

While statute requires counties to have objectives to reduce recidivism, it doesn't require a county to evaluate the overall effectiveness of these objectives. When properly managed and evaluated, programs aimed at reducing recidivism can serve as a form of accountability for repeat offenders. Salt Lake County's strategic plan doesn't include metrics to determine whether its programs effectively reduce recidivism or meet its

goals.⁵ Without meaningful measures to demonstrate program effectiveness, it is unclear whether programs are working as intended.

For example, programs overseen by the DA's office aimed at addressing mental health and substance abuse are not transparent.⁶ These programs are meant to help repeat offenders—such as those with drug dependency challenges—achieve more favorable outcomes in the justice system upon successful completion. While the DA's office reports that it measures the percentage of participants who complete the programs, it does not track individuals who reoffend after completion. As such, county leaders and the public lack insight into whether these programs effectively promote accountability.

⁵ Rather, the county's current strategic plan lists outcomes that include the number of interviews conducted with crisis response professionals, steps taken to engage community partners, and legislative bills tracked.

⁶ See "A Performance Audit of the Salt Lake District Attorney's Office" (#2025-31), page 15. Ideally, the prosecutor acts as a gatekeeper for these alternative-to-incarceration programs, determining whether offenders should be permitted to participate.

Best practices from the U.S. Department of Justice state that a primary responsibility of coordinating councils should be to collect and analyze data that informs the council about the performance of the system and the effectiveness of its strategies.⁷ To improve oversight, the Legislature could amend the CJCC statute to require counties to establish performance metrics for the different recidivism-reducing programs, and then use available data to evaluate their effectiveness.



Best practices state that county coordinating councils should collect and analyze data that informs them about the effectiveness of its strategies.

RECOMMENDATION 1.1

The Legislature should consider amending statute to require counties to establish performance metrics to evaluate the effectiveness of recidivism-reducing programs. Counties could report these metrics and outcomes in their strategic plans, helping to demonstrate if programs are working as intended.

A Dual Approach to Criminal Justice Can Include Both Recidivism-Reducing Programs and Traditional Accountability Mechanisms for Repeat Offenders

Salt Lake County's primary criminal justice strategy focuses on reducing recidivism among repeat offenders with underlying issues like homelessness and behavioral health challenges. We acknowledge the importance of programs designed to address these areas. Even so, we believe they should be paired with traditional enforcement mechanisms—such as incarceration—to ensure accountability for repeated offenders. In our report on the Salt Lake County Jail, we highlight how a lack of jail capacity has led to poor outcomes in the criminal justice system. A dual approach focusing on both support systems and incarceration can improve the accountability for repeat offenders.

A Singular Focus on Support Services May Overlook Accountability for Some Repeat Criminal Offenders

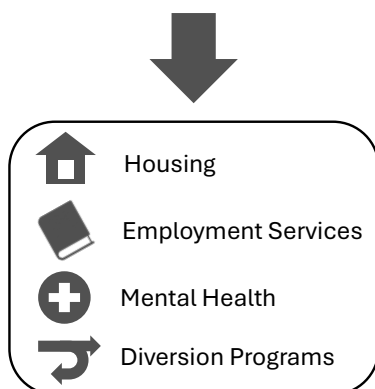
Salt Lake county notes that jail has become the default response for repeat offenders with mental health challenges and emphasizes alternatives-to-incarceration programs to reduce recidivism. For example, county plans include

⁷ U.S. Department of Justice. National Institute of Corrections "CJCC Essential Elements. A Companion to the National Standards for Criminal Justice Coordinating Councils." August 2025.



expanding housing units that focus on mental health services, job training, and other support services for homeless individuals with criminal involvement.

Single-Track Model
Emphasizes alternatives-to-incarceration programs



Source: Auditor generated.

The current approach follows a single-track model that focuses on services aimed at addressing the underlying causes of repeated criminal behavior. It places less emphasis on traditional methods, such as incarceration, for repeated criminal behavior. This approach can be seen to the left.

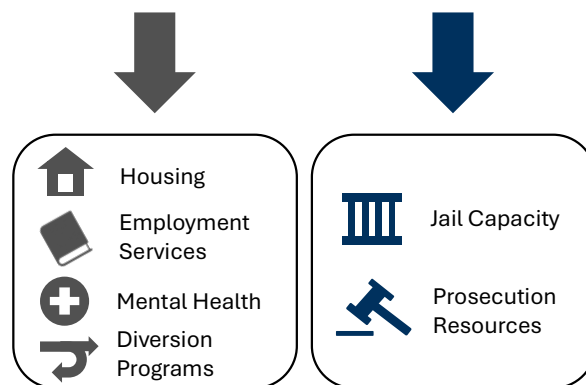
While these services play a vital role in the criminal justice system, they cannot fully replace incarceration as a viable enforcement tool. While incarceration may not be the most effective support system for certain populations, limited jail capacity remains a significant concern. As

highlighted in our audit of the county jail, insufficient jail capacity has resulted in thousands of overcrowding releases. Data shows that overcrowding releases contributed to increased recidivism with more individuals reoffending each year after being released.⁸

A Dual-Track Model Could Prioritize Both Support Services and Traditional Accountability Measures

A dual-track approach to criminal justice can provide complementary strategies that achieve shared public safety goals for repeat offenders. Alternative-to-incarceration efforts should be balanced with traditional accountability measures. This balance includes the credible possibility of incarceration and sufficient prosecution for repeated criminal behavior as a strong accountability mechanism. For example, the King County, Washington jail held repeat offenders with low-level criminal charges to ensure sufficient accountability for repeated criminal behavior. The Seattle City Attorney's Office estimates that holding these repeat offenders reduced their impact on the city and eliminated over 750 police referrals in a year. They used a dual-track model focusing on both services and incarceration

Dual-Track Model
Emphasizes alternatives-to-incarceration and traditional accountability mechanisms



Source: Auditor generated.

⁸ See "A Performance Audit of the Salt Lake County Jail" (#2025-30), page 10.

and improved the overall criminal justice system. The dual-track model can be seen in the figure on the right.

Without adequate jail capacity, there is no incentive to comply with alternative-to-incarceration programs. For example, the Seattle City Attorney’s Office also found that many repeat offenders agreed to treatment programs as an alternative to jail but withdrew before starting the programs. Incarceration also reduces the likelihood of reoffending. Jail data found that those serving a jail sentence were less likely to reoffend than those who were released because of jail overcrowding.⁹

Adequate prosecutorial resources and data are also necessary to hold repeat offenders accountable. Prosecutors in Salt Lake County receive thousands of referrals each year and maintain large caseloads.¹⁰ Large caseloads can negatively impact accountability for repeat offenders.

A dual-track approach to criminal justice echoes findings from prior Salt Lake County studies. The studies emphasize the need to balance supportive services with meaningful accountability to promote public safety. The following shows some of the findings of these prior studies.



A dual-track approach to criminal justice echoes findings from prior Salt Lake County studies.

**2011: Salt Lake County
Action Plan for Criminal And
Social Justice**

"Studies have found that the greatest reductions in recidivism are achieved when meaningful supervision is coupled with substantive treatment – and when the system can deliver immediate consequences for non-compliant behavior."

**2017: Salt Lake County
Custody and Treatment Bed
Projections**

"We must provide a 'systems approach' to our custody and treatment needs...This will require a commitment to funding new custody and treatment beds, opening existing beds, and optimizing existing services."

**2024: CGL Study on the
Salt Lake County Criminal
Justice System**

"...in discussions regarding the need for more treatment and out of custody programs, the public needs to be reassured that their safety is being preserved while maintaining accountability for criminal activity."

Source: Auditor generated from the various studies regarding Salt Lake County's criminal justice system.

Our work echoes the importance of both options to strengthen accountability within the criminal justice system.

⁹ See "A Performance Audit of the Salt Lake County Jail" (#2025-30), page 11.

¹⁰ See "A Performance Audit of the Salt Lake County District Attorney's Office" (#2025-31), page 15.



Other States Require Criminal Justice Coordinating Councils to Consider Jail Capacity

Statutory language in other states lists jail capacity as a consideration for county coordinating councils. Three states' statutory language is seen below.

NM

"A criminal justice coordinating council shall develop a strategic plan to meet the requirements of this section and shall:

(1) review the criminal justice system in the judicial district, including judicial processes, law enforcement, community corrections alternatives, and sufficiency of jail and detention facilities."

"The council shall meet...for the purpose of assessing the population status of all detention or correctional facilities owned or contracted by the county...and formulating recommendations to ensure that the capacities of such facilities are not exceeded... The council may also develop a local public safety plan for future construction needs..."

FL

IN

"A local or regional advisory council shall do the following:

(1)Review, evaluate, and make recommendation for local

(A) criminal justice systems and corrections programs;

(B) pretrial services;

(C) behavioral health treatment and recovery services...

(3)Review and evaluate local jail overcrowding and recommend a range of possible overcrowding solutions."

Source: Auditor generated from the individual states' statutes. Emphasis added.

The Legislature can consider adding similar language to statute to provide additional oversight for counties. A dual-track model that evaluates recidivism-reducing programs and considers traditional accountability mechanisms can strengthen county criminal justice systems.

RECOMMENDATION 1.2

The Legislature should consider amending statute to require counties to establish a dual-track approach to criminal justice. This could include language to require counties to consider traditional accountability methods, such as ensuring adequate jail capacity, as part of their plan. This dual focus can improve accountability for repeat offenders in the criminal justice system.





Complete List of Audit Recommendations





Complete List of Audit Recommendations

This report made the following two recommendations. The numbering convention assigned to each recommendation consists of its chapter followed by a period and recommendation number within that chapter.

Recommendation 1.1

The Legislature should consider amending statute to require counties to establish performance metrics to evaluate the effectiveness or recidivism-reducing programs. Counties could report these metrics and outcomes in their strategic plans, helping to demonstrate if programs are working as intended.

Recommendation 1.2

The Legislature should consider amending statute to require counties to establish a dual-track approach to criminal justice. This could include language to require counties to consider traditional accountability methods, such as ensuring adequate jail capacity, as part of their plan. This dual focus can improve accountability for repeat offenders in the criminal justice system.





Agency Response





POLICE DEPARTMENT

Dear Legislative Audit Team,

First, we express gratitude for the time and effort put into this audit. We are encouraged by recent progress on the recommendations in Salt Lake City, where the Mayor's Public Safety Plan policy group is meeting regularly to address the issue of repeat offenses. The policy group encompasses all the partners identified in the audit. This group also maintains close coordination with the Salt Lake County Criminal Justice Advisory Council and members of the State Legislature.

A notable example of this coordination is the C.O.N.N.E.C.T (Case Oversight for Needs, Navigation, Enforcement, Care, and Treatment) pilot project. This program involves the 50 individuals who most frequently interact with the Salt Lake City Police Department. By enhancing accountability and providing support to this population over the past 8 months, we have witnessed a decrease in arrests, new cases, and additional system interactions. While the number of days individuals spend in jail has increased, it presents an opportunity for these individuals to be assessed and begin receiving assistance with their substance use and behavioral health issues. While this type of diversion or intervention would ideally occur outside the criminal justice system, improved assistance and opportunities in our jails can be a lifeline for individuals struggling on our streets. True progress will be achieved not only with additional jail time, but through increased accountability and improved coordination of support.

We concur with and endorse the recommendation to assess the efficacy of diversion programs and recidivism-reducing initiatives by measuring their impact and use of resources. Through the appropriate accountability measures and data analysis, we can ensure that dollars are allocated effectively.

In the 2024 General Session, the Legislature enacted a mandate for county coordinating councils within the state to prioritize reentry and collaborate with local mental health authorities. This legislation was designed to reduce recidivism rates and improve support for individuals being released from prison or jail.

We also concur with the auditors' recommendation to incorporate additional guidance for coordinating councils to assess the effectiveness of diversion programs and consider appropriate jail capacity as a component of their planning process.

Enhanced accountability and robust support for individuals who traverse the criminal justice system are not mutually exclusive concepts. Both are essential for fostering positive community outcomes when applied appropriately. Ensuring swift, certain and fair consequences coupled with support for behavioral and mental health, substance abuse, and criminogenic behaviors will lead to positive outcomes for the community and individuals cycling through the system.

Brian Read, Chief of Police- Salt Lake City Police Department



SALT LAKE COUNTY
SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Rosie Rivera
Sheriff

Cynthia Archuleta
Undersheriff



Matt Dumont
Chief Deputy

Kari Huth
Chief Deputy

Jason Ackerman
Chief Deputy

December 1, 2025

Kade R. Minchey, CIA, CFE, Auditor General
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Dear Mr. Minchey,

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to *A Review of Salt Lake County's Criminal Justice System: Strengthening Oversight and Coordination for Repeat Criminal Offenders (Report No. 2025-32)*. I appreciate the professionalism of your team and the collaborative approach they brought to this review, including their engagement with our jail staff. Alongside the recent performance audit of the Salt Lake County Jail, this Capstone Report outlines a path for improving coordination and strengthening outcomes across the county's criminal justice system.

The report highlights systemwide challenges that extend beyond any single agency. The Sheriff's Office is committed to addressing these challenges by strengthening coordination among criminal justice partners and focusing on strategies that reduce repeat offending. Eliminating overcrowd releases remains a priority (we have not conducted one since June 1, 2025) and we continue to advocate for additional jail capacity to house both pre-trial detainees and individuals serving jail sentences. Through the Salt Lake County Criminal Justice Advisory Council (CJAC), we will work closely with law enforcement jurisdictions, the Salt Lake County District Attorney's Office, and the Utah State Courts to improve alignment and systemwide consistency.

We also agree that reducing repeat criminal behavior requires a dual approach. The Sheriff's Office supports and is engaged in the County's work with the Leifman Group to bring expanded mental-health and substance-use treatment models into our system, which are expected to reduce recidivism while ensuring accountability. At the same time, we will continue advocating for additional jail beds based on population forecasts in the planned 2026 bond proposal.

We support the recommendations outlined in this report and will work with the Legislature as they consider potential statutory changes. The Sheriff's Office remains available for continued discussion and welcomes the opportunity to host jail tours for policymakers as Salt Lake County works to address criminal justice system challenges.

Sincerely,

Rosa M. Rivera

Rosie Rivera
Salt Lake County Sheriff





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