

A Performance Audit of the

Salt Lake County Jail

The Impact of Insufficient Jail Capacity
on Criminal Justice Outcomes

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 Performance Audit of the Salt Lake County Jail” [Report #2025-30].

An audit summary is found at the front of the report. The scope and objectives of the audit are included in the audit summary. In addition, each chapter has a corresponding chapter summary found at its beginning.

Utah Code 36-12-15.3(2) requires the Office of the Legislative Auditor General to designate an audited entity’s chief officer. Therefore, the designated chief officer for the Salt Lake County Jail entity is Sheriff Rosie Rivera. Sheriff Rivera has been notified that they must comply with the audit response and reporting requirements as outlined in this section of *Utah Code*.

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

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PERFORMANCE AUDIT

AUDIT REQUEST

In November 2024, the Legislative Audit Subcommittee requested audits of the Salt Lake City Police Department and District and County Attorneys. Given the close operational ties between the police, district attorney, and the jail, the audit scope was expanded to include a report on the Salt Lake County Jail.

BACKGROUND

The Salt Lake County Sheriff has statutory authority to oversee the county jail and its operations. Elected in 2017, Sheriff Rosie Rivera inherited a jail that had already been full for more than a decade.

Following an initial risk assessment, we identified challenges tied to jail capacity, which has resulted in thousands of inmate releases due to overcrowding. These releases negatively impact public safety and the larger criminal justice system as individuals reoffend at a higher rate and attend court hearings less often than other release types.

A PERFORMANCE AUDIT OF THE SALT LAKE COUNTY JAIL



KEY FINDINGS

- ✓ 1.1 Overcrowding Releases Are Linked to Frequent and Sometimes More Severe Reoffending
- ✓ 2.1 Overcrowding Releases Have Contributed to Higher Failure-to-Appear Rates in Salt Lake County Courts
- ✓ 2.2 Legislative Action Prompted Salt Lake County to Stop Overcrowding Releases, but Jail Capacity Must Be Addressed to Sustain Progress
- ✓ 3.1 Salt Lake County Repeatedly Studied Jail Expansion but Has Not Increased Capacity in 25 years



RECOMMENDATIONS

- ✓ The Salt Lake County Jail should use risk assessments that consider criminal history and prior failures to appear in court when it needs to release individuals due to overcrowding.
- ✓ Salt Lake County should revise its jail population forecast to account for changes by House Bill 312.
- ✓ Salt Lake County could consider a range of options – including voter referendum, council-authorized bonds, or legislative coordination – to address inadequate jail capacity.
- ✓ The sheriff should establish metrics and regularly analyze jail data in areas such as recidivism.
- ✓ The county mayor should coordinate with the sheriff to assess jail needs. This may require independently evaluating jail needs separate from public safety funding.
- ✓ The county council could provide forums for the independently elected officials, such as the sheriff, to collaborate on funding needs for the jail outside of the mayor’s budget.



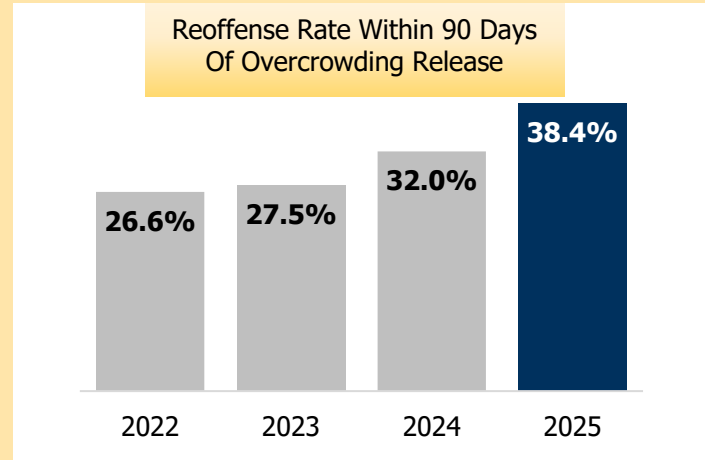
REPORT SUMMARY

The Jail Resorted to More than 100,000 Overcrowding Releases, Weakening Public Safety

Records going back to 2007 show more than 100,000 overcrowding releases. Individuals released by overcrowding in 2025 spent an average of 12 hours in jail.

Individuals released through overcrowding reoffend at higher rates than other release types, including for severe offenses. Reoffense rates have also increased each of the last three years following overcrowding releases.

RECIDIVISM IS INCREASING AFTER OVERCROWDING RELEASES



Insufficient Jail Capacity Burdens the Criminal Justice System

Overcrowding releases lead to further delays on the already-burdened justice system. Individuals released from jail due to overcrowding are less likely to appear for scheduled court hearings.

This contributes to Salt Lake County having the state's highest rate of defendants failing to appear in court. These failed court appearances and ensuing warrants increase the administrative burden across the system.

Preliminary data shows that failure-to-appear rates declined in Salt Lake County Justice Courts after the jail stopped overcrowding releases. Addressing jail capacity for the long-term will be necessary to sustain this progress.

Salt Lake County Has Not Made Jail Capacity a Priority

Over the past 15 years, the county initiated four formal studies that pointed to the need to expand the jail. The county's continued inaction caused it to fall further behind on jail capacity as the county population grew.

With a growing population and two aging facilities that are functionally full, Salt Lake County needs to increase capacity. County leaders indicate they will try another voter referendum in 2026 to address jail capacity.

The county should also consider other options to remedy the overdue expansion of the jail.

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Introduction

A Performance Audit of the Salt Lake County Jail—The Impact of Insufficient Jail Capacity on Criminal Justice Outcomes was conducted as part of a series of audits evaluating the efficiency and effectiveness of the criminal justice system in Salt Lake County. The audits released as part of this series are seen in blue in the following figure. In May 2025, the Legislative Audit Subcommittee further expanded our scope to include a performance audit of the Utah State Court System. This audit is ongoing and will be presented to the Legislative Audit Subcommittee at a future date upon completion.



In these audits, we evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of these organizations both individually and collectively, as each performs an essential function in the criminal justice system. We also provide a comprehensive capstone report that focuses on the roles of each entity within the county’s criminal justice system and how these entities can better coordinate to improve public safety goals.

Audit Recommendations Informed by Current and Past Practices Are Designed to Help the Salt Lake County Jail Improve

The mission of the Office of the Legislative Auditor General is to help organizations improve. This mission can be seen in the following graphic:



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We have designed recommendations to fulfill our mission and help improve the performance of the Salt Lake County Jail. During this audit, the Salt Lake County Jail stopped a longstanding practice of releasing offenders because of overcrowding. This policy shift came in response to recent legislation. Our analysis details the negative impact overcrowding releases have had on public safety and the county's criminal justice system. Increasing jail capacity remains a critical need. Even with recent action, the jail operates near capacity in aging facilities as the county population continues to grow. Our recommendations provide steps Salt Lake County leaders can take to fill this critical gap in the criminal justice system.



BACKGROUND

The Salt Lake County Jail has not had sufficient jail capacity for the past two decades. As a result, the jail resorted to more than 100,000 inmate releases due to overcrowding since 2007. Recent legislation now prohibits overcrowding releases for certain repeat offenders.

FINDING 1.1

Overcrowding Releases are Linked to Frequent and Sometimes More Severe Reoffending

FINDING 1.2

Individuals Released Due to Overcrowding Reoffend More Than Convicted Offenders Who Complete a Jail Sentence

RECOMMENDATION 1.1

The Salt Lake County Jail should use risk assessments that consider offender history when it needs to release individuals due to overcrowding. The use of an assessment minimizes violent and high-risk offenders being released back into the community.



CONCLUSION

Overcrowding releases are a problem unique to Salt Lake County. An increasing recidivism rate indicates a risk to public safety. This chapter's recommendation is meant to assist the jail in the short term while it considers options to address inadequate jail capacity.





Chapter 1

Salt Lake County's Inaction on Jail Expansion Weakened Efforts to Maintain Public Safety

The Salt Lake County Jail has not had sufficient jail capacity for the past two decades. As a result, the jail resorted to more than 100,000 inmate releases due to overcrowding since 2007.¹ We found that individuals released because of overcrowding reoffend at significantly higher rates than those released from jail through standard methods. Of the 1,785 overcrowding releases made in early 2025, 38 percent were rebooked into jail within 90 days with a new charge. The reoffenses include higher rates of severe criminal charges. These public safety findings demonstrate that the Salt Lake County Jail needs to address jail capacity.



The Salt Lake County Jail has not had sufficient capacity for the past two decades. As a result, it has resorted to more than 100,000 inmate releases due to overcrowding since 2007.

Insufficient jail capacity also affects the criminal justice system because it limits one of the key tools for discouraging criminal activity. Recent legislation spurred Salt Lake County to halt overcrowding in 2025,² but a long-term solution for jail capacity is still needed. Some of the larger recommendations to address this concern are found in Chapter 3. The recommendation in this chapter can be accomplished more quickly in preparation for jail expansion.

The County Can Benefit from a Dual Approach That Focuses on Both Support Services and Jail Capacity

We recognize that criminal justice issues are complex. Counties should prioritize support services and programs that address underlying challenges such as mental health, substance abuse, and homelessness. There are important programs that can help individuals through these challenges; if successful, these programs can reduce the demands on the criminal justice system.

However, these efforts must be balanced with accountability measures, including the credible possibility of incarceration for repeated criminal behavior and noncompliance. Relying solely on either support services or enforcement creates an ineffective system. These priorities echo findings from prior Salt Lake County

¹ The exact number is likely greater than 100,000. Conservative estimates were used for 2008 and portions of 2009 based on available reports.

² House Bill 312, 2025 Legislative General Session

studies, which emphasized the need to balance supportive interventions with meaningful accountability to promote public safety and long-term rehabilitation.

This report focuses specifically on the Salt Lake County Jail and the negative effects of not having sufficient jail capacity. The recommendations in this report outline first steps for the county to take as they address jail resources. In our report “*A Review of Salt Lake County’s Criminal Justice System*” (#2025-32), we discuss how a dual approach of support services and jail capacity is needed to improve the county’s criminal justice system.

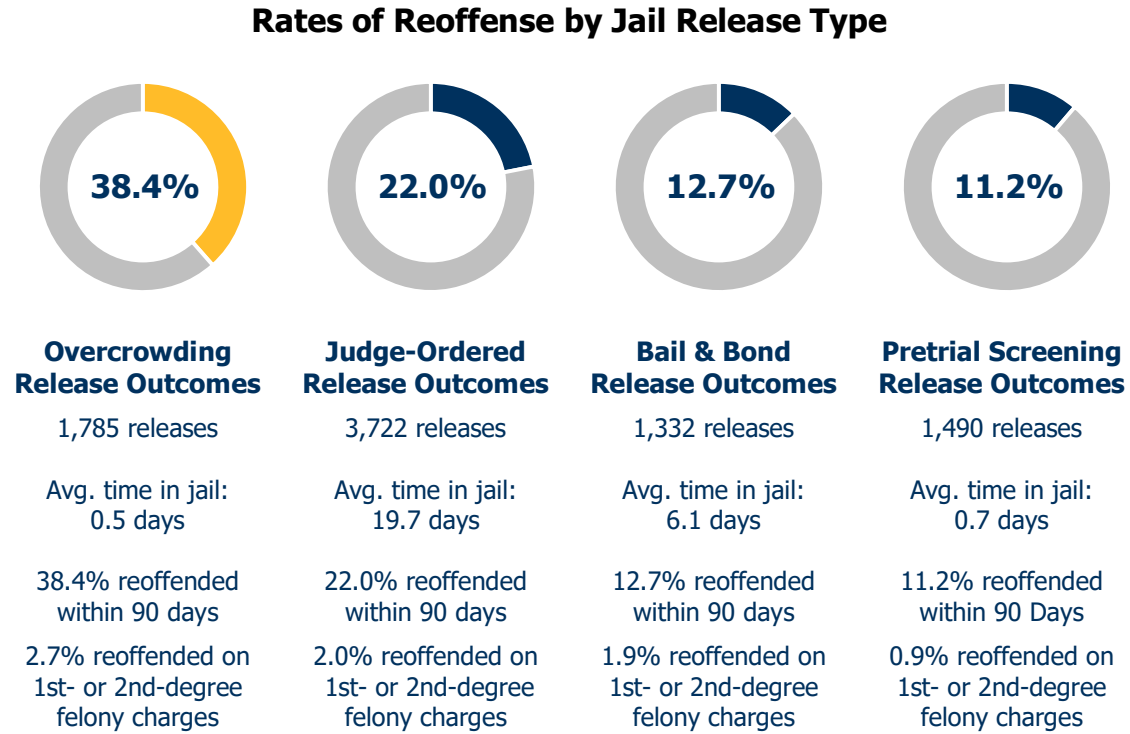
1.1 Overcrowding Releases Are Linked to Frequent and Sometimes More Severe Reoffending

Insufficient capacity has resulted in the jail releasing many offenders due to overcrowding.³ This is concerning, as individuals released because of overcrowding reoffend more than twice as much as those released through standard means prior to a trial. Over 38 percent of those released due to overcrowding will be arrested on new criminal charges and brought back to jail within 90 days. That is compared to an average of 18 percent for those released by other methods. The crime that followed overcrowding releases was not limited to low-level offenses, as this group also saw the highest rate of re-arrest on first- and second-degree felony charges. The following figure shows the percentage of individuals who return to jail on new charges by release type:

³ People can be released from jail before trial in several ways, including decisions by judges and pretrial screeners. But Salt Lake County is the only one of Utah’s five largest counties that regularly released inmates due to overcrowding. *Utah Code* 77-20-203 gives sheriffs the authority to make these releases.



Figure 1.1 More Crime Followed Overcrowding Releases than Standard Jail Releases—Including More Serious Crimes. Individuals released because of overcrowding in 2025 were re-arrested and rebooked into jail on new criminal charges more than twice as often as those released through standard jail release processes.

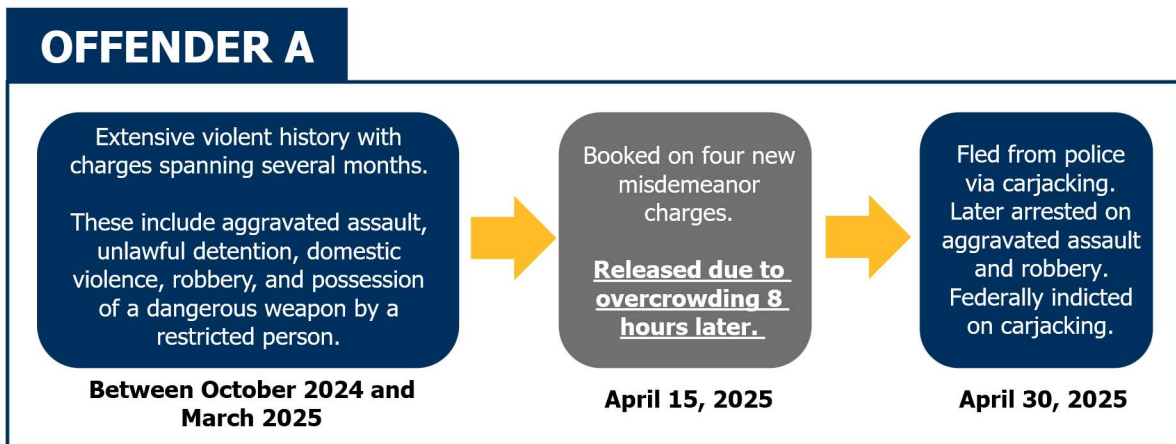


Source: Auditor generated based on Salt Lake County Jail releases from January 1, 2025, to May 31, 2025.

To illustrate this concern, we highlight three recent aggravated kidnapping cases that occurred shortly after individuals were released due to jail overcrowding.

Three Case Examples Illustrate Escalating Crime Due To Salt Lake County’s Practice of Overcrowding Releases

We share three cases to demonstrate the public safety risks that arise when overcrowding releases become a routine practice and violent histories are not considered. All three cases involve individuals with violent histories who were released due to overcrowding. Each went on to quickly recommit additional violent offenses after their release. Two weeks after Offender A's overcrowding release (seen in the figure on the following page), he threatened a vehicle owner with a knife and forced the owner to drive him out of a police containment area. In the six months leading up to that overcrowding release, West Valley Police brought this offender to jail for three other incidents, including domestic violence, robbery, and other felony charges.



Two other offenders were also released on overcrowding in 2025 and quickly re-arrested on first-degree felony kidnapping charges. Offender B, who had previous domestic violence convictions from multiple incidents, assaulted his domestic partner and then swung a machete at her when she tried to flee. Offender C was overcrowding-released despite three prior domestic violence convictions.

OFFENDER B

Domestic violence conviction in 2022 and 2023. Served jail sentences in 2024.

Re-arrested and released due to overcrowding in March 2025.

Arrested six days later on new domestic violence charges of first-degree felony aggravated kidnapping and third-degree felony assault.

OFFENDER C

Criminal convictions from 16 incidents, including 2 felonies and 3 domestic violence incidents.

Re-arrested for theft and drug charges but released due to overcrowding in March 2025.

Arrested two days later on new domestic violence charge of first-degree felony aggravated kidnapping.

We recognize that individuals can reoffend regardless of release type. However, as seen previously, those released due to overcrowding have a much higher reoffense rate. The types of cases shown in the above examples are not isolated—many overcrowding releases involve individuals with concerning risk profiles. We analyzed 100 randomly selected overcrowding releases from 2025 and found the following:



- **29 released individuals** rated at the highest risk level on an assessment measuring likelihood of reoffense, violence, or failure to appear in court.⁴ Individuals with this score should typically be held in jail without bail, according to guidelines used by the Utah Courts.
 - **5 of those 29 cases** involved individuals specifically flagged as violent offenders, scoring 4 or more on a 7-point violence scale. An additional **14 cases** fell one point below this threshold.
- **36 other cases** involved individuals booked into jail on warrants, either because they failed to attend court hearings or because they violated other conditions of their previous jail release.

This limited snapshot reveals a troubling pattern: Because of overcrowding, the jail released individuals flagged as high-risk, violent, or noncompliant. These findings suggest that overcrowding releases undermined public safety and created an accountability gap in the justice system. Reoffense rates following overcrowding releases have also increased each of the last three years, as seen in the following section.

Individuals Released on Overcrowding Are Arrested for New Charges at an Increasing Rate

Over 38 percent of individuals released by overcrowding in 2025 were back in jail with new criminal charges within 90 days. Between 2022 and 2025,⁵ the new crime rebooking rate increased by about 12 percentage points as shown in Figure 1.2.



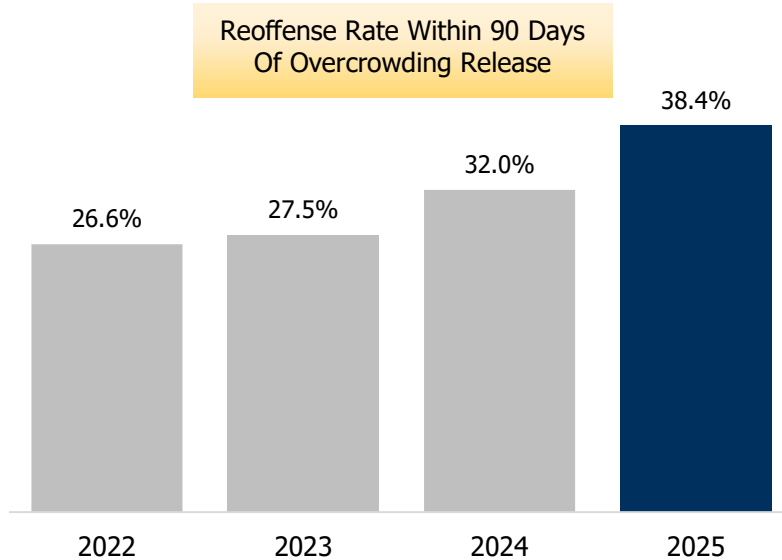
Over 38 percent of individuals released by overcrowding in 2025 were back in jail with new criminal charges within 90 days.

⁴ Criminal Justice Services (CJS) is a separate county department from Salt Lake County Corrections, which runs and operates the jail. Corrections did not use the CJS risk assessments in overcrowding decisions, as discussed later in this chapter.

⁵ Overcrowding releases took place at the Salt Lake County Jail until May 31, 2025.

Figure 1.2 Recidivism After Overcrowding Releases Is Getting Worse.

Individuals released due to overcrowding are getting re-arrested on new criminal charges at a higher rate each year, a sign of a burdened criminal justice system.



Source: Auditor generated based on data from the Salt Lake County Jail. Note: Overcrowding releases stopped on June 1, 2025.



Individuals are increasingly committing new crimes only a few months after overcrowding releases.

The increasing recidivism rate indicates a risk to public safety as individuals are increasingly committing new crimes only a few months after overcrowding releases. This recurring issue significantly slows down the criminal justice system within the county, creating inefficiencies across its operations.⁶ This is a problem unique to Salt Lake

County. Jails in Utah’s other large counties do not release inmates because of overcrowding.⁷ As such, we can’t make comparisons with other counties.

1.2 Individuals Released Due to Overcrowding Reoffend More than Convicted Offenders Who Complete a Jail Sentence

Overcrowding releases can send the message that there are fewer consequences for criminal behavior. Reoffense data from Salt Lake County supports this finding. We compared overcrowding releases against releases of convicted offenders who completed a jail sentence. Those released on overcrowding

⁶ This issue will be discussed further in Chapter 2.

⁷ The Utah County Jail introduced temporary booking restrictions in 2025 when renovation work reduced capacity.



reoffended over three times more than offenders released after completing their jail sentences, which averaged 51 days. This is shown in Figure 1.3.

Figure 1.3 Overcrowding Releases See More Post-Release Criminal Activity than Convicted Offenders Released After Completing a Jail Sentence. The data shown below is based on releases from the Salt Lake County Jail between January and May 2025.

Jail Release Type	Number of Releases	Average Days in Jail	Percentage Who Returned to Jail on New Charges within 90 days	Percentage Charged with Committing a New First- or Second-Degree Felony within 90 Days
Overcrowding	1,785	0.5	38.4%	2.7%
Sentence Served	1,311	50.8	11.3%	1.1%

Source: Auditor generated from data provided by the Salt Lake County Jail.

Without sufficient jail capacity, the threat of incarceration loses its effectiveness in some cases. The U.S. Department of Justice notes how insufficient capacity results in weakened accountability:

U.S. Dept. of Justice
Jail Capacity Planning Guide

"A crowded jail can result in the loss of system integrity. This occurs when inmates are turned loose from the jail through 'forced releases.' It does not take long for this to become common knowledge. In some jurisdictions, defendants routinely ask jail staff at the time of booking how soon it will be before they are 'forced released' back to the streets."



Without sufficient jail capacity, the threat of incarceration appears to lose its effectiveness in some cases.

In fact, after the jail stopped overcrowding releases,⁸ jail staff reported that one repeat offender was surprised that he was getting “dressed in” to stay in jail rather than being released on the same day. Other repeat offenders shared his perception, refusing treatment services offered as an alternative to jail because they knew the jail would release them quickly. All offenders released due to overcrowding are unsupervised when

they reenter the community, reinforcing the perception of minimal consequences or oversight for repeated criminal behavior.

⁸ The passage of House Bill 312 in 2025 mandated the jail to adjust overcrowding release practices. This is discussed further in Chapter 2.

Violent Offenders Were Released Because the Jail Did Not Consider Criminal History

Beyond the lack of jail capacity, another major concern is the jail does not consider an individual's full criminal history when making overcrowding release decisions. In 2015, The Council of State Governments Justice Center recommended that Salt Lake County conduct risk screenings and assessments for every person booked into jail. These assessments factor in criminal history, charge severity, and past failures to appear in court. The 2015 report also recommended that the jail use these assessments to inform all release decisions, including overcrowding releases. During this audit, Salt Lake County's Criminal Justice Services conducted risk assessments for people booked on new charges. However, the jail did not draw upon these assessments for overcrowding release decisions.

Returning to our earlier examples, the overcrowding releases for Offenders A, B, and C each followed jail protocol. This is because their new charges for that specific jail booking were below the severity threshold set by the jail.⁹ This narrow focus did not consider risk factors like previous violent charges and convictions. If the jail considered offenders' history to guide overcrowding decisions, it would have weighed their prior violent offenses, other pending cases, and failed court appearances.

Recent legislation now prohibits overcrowding releases for many repeat offenders. However, the law still allows overcrowding releases in certain circumstances. An expansion to jail capacity takes time to plan, fund, and implement, as discussed in Chapter 3. Our recommendation in this chapter is meant to assist the jail in the short term while it considers options to address inadequate jail capacity. However, as these actions are pursued, we recommend the Salt Lake County Jail use validated public safety risk assessments on any future releases caused by overcrowding.



In 2024, the Salt Lake County Jail issued 3,947 overcrowding releases.

964 of these releases were individuals who had been booked on a third-degree felony.

⁹ For certain offenses, the jail may not release an individual on their own recognizance. These offenses include violent felonies and DUIs that result in serious injury.



RECOMMENDATION 1.1

The Salt Lake County Jail should use risk assessments that consider offender history when it needs to release individuals due to overcrowding. The use of an assessment minimizes the chance of violent and high-risk offenders being released back into the community.





BACKGROUND

Many jail releases, including overcrowding releases, are conditional on the individual promising to appear in court. Judges will issue warrants when a defendant fails to appear in court. These warrants prompt law enforcement to return the individual to jail.

FINDING 2.1

Overcrowding Releases have Contributed to Higher Failure-to-Appear Rates in Salt Lake County Courts

RECOMMENDATION 2.1

The Salt Lake County Jail should revise its release policy to include prior instances of failing to appear in court in the release decision process. Including a failure-to-appear element could inform jail managers about who has regularly missed court dates so it can decide on whether to release the individual.

FINDING 2.2

Legislative Action Prompted Salt Lake County to Stop Overcrowding Releases, but Jail Capacity Must Be Addressed to Sustain Progress

RECOMMENDATION 2.2

Salt Lake County should revise its jail population forecast to account for changes by House Bill 312. This will help the jail better implement the legislation while the county considers larger action on jail capacity, which is addressed in Chapter 3.



CONCLUSION

Overcrowding releases lead to further strain on the already-burdened justice system. Overcrowding's negative impact on the broader criminal justice system is further reason to expand jail capacity. The recommendations in this chapter are meant to assist the jail in the short-term as it weighs the options to address long-term capacity needs.



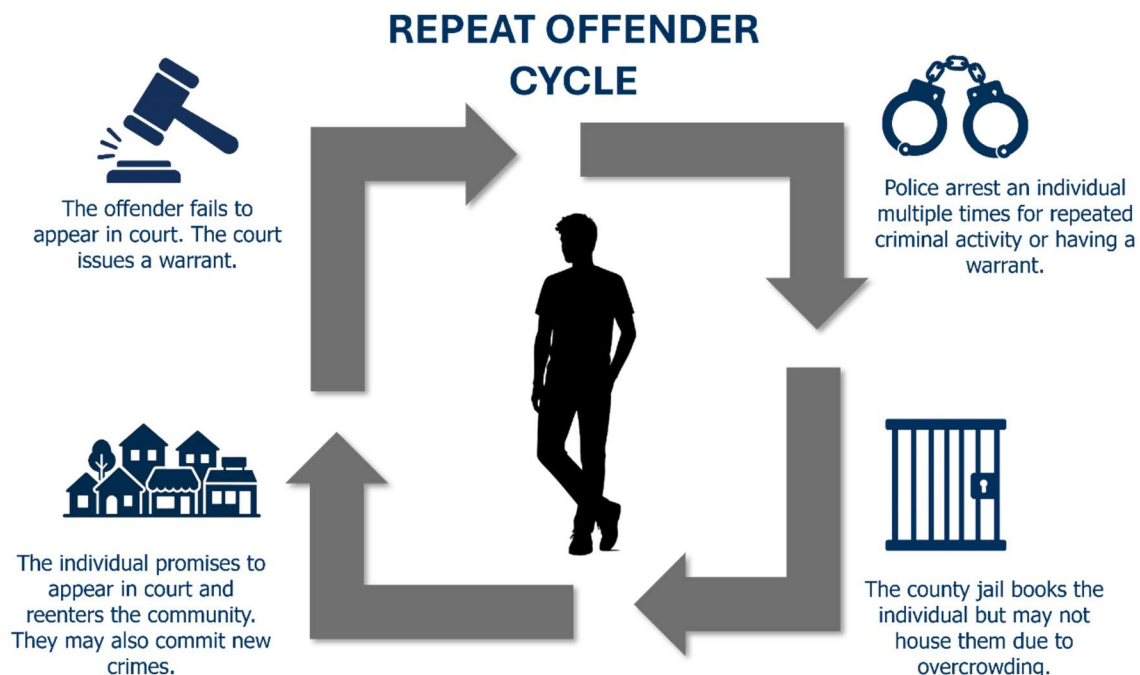


Chapter 2

Insufficient Jail Capacity Burdens Salt Lake County's Criminal Justice System

Overcrowding releases lead to further strain within the already-burdened justice system. Individuals released from jail due to overcrowding are less likely to appear for scheduled court hearings. This contributes to Salt Lake County having the state's highest rate of defendants failing to appear in court. These failed court appearances and ensuing warrants increase the administrative burden across the system. Overcrowding's negative impact on the broader criminal justice system is further reason to expand jail capacity.

Salt Lake County courts have the state's highest failure-to-appear rate at 14.7 percent—well above 9.6 percent for the rest of the state. Defendants' absence from court leads to the issuance of warrants. When these individuals later encounter law enforcement, they are taken back into custody because they have outstanding warrants. In many cases, the jail releases the person because of overcrowding, which restarts the cycle. This cycle is seen in the following graphic:



2.1 Overcrowding Releases Have Contributed to Higher Failure-to-Appear Rates in Salt Lake County Courts

Salt Lake County has a higher percentage of defendants failing to appear in court than the rest of the state. This slows down the criminal justice system as more warrants are issued for missing court dates. Similar to violent histories, the jail does not consider an offender's history of failing to appear in court when determining whom to release on overcrowding.¹⁰ This can result in some offenders accumulating many warrants for missing multiple court dates.

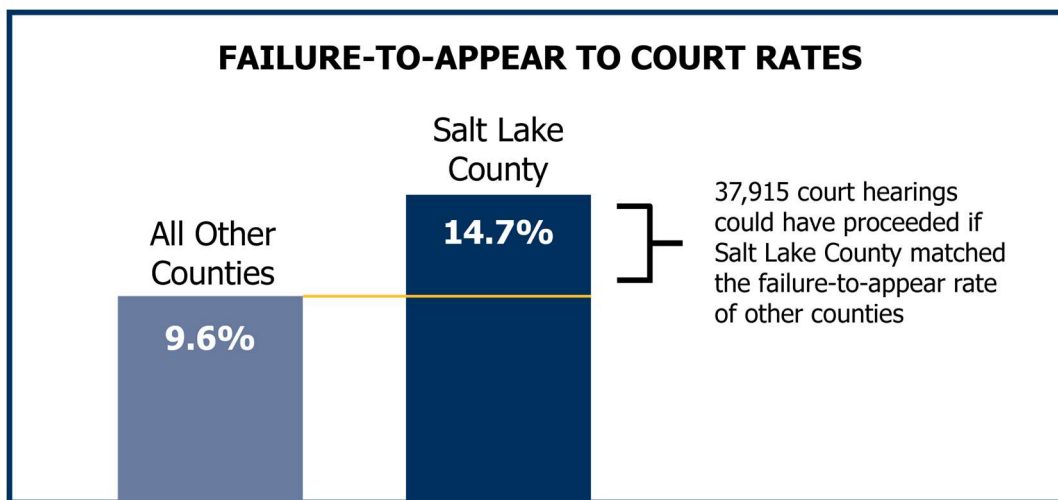


Overcrowding releases have contributed to Salt Lake County having a higher percentage of defendants failing to appear in court than the rest of the state.

For example, we found a case where the jail released an individual 10 times in a row due to overcrowding, despite documented failures to appear in court. Each missed hearing added to the individual's growing list of unresolved charges and warrants. By early June 2025, when police arrested him again, he had 88 active warrants and 130 distinct charges on his booking sheet.

Salt Lake County's failure-to-appear rate is 5 percentage points higher than the rest of the state. This difference equates to almost 38,000 missed court hearings between 2022 and 2025, as seen in the following figure:

Figure 2.1 Salt Lake County's High Failure-to-Appear Rates Lead to Wasted Time in the Courts. The county is 5 percentage points higher for failures-to-appear than the rest of the state between January 1, 2022, and May 8, 2025.



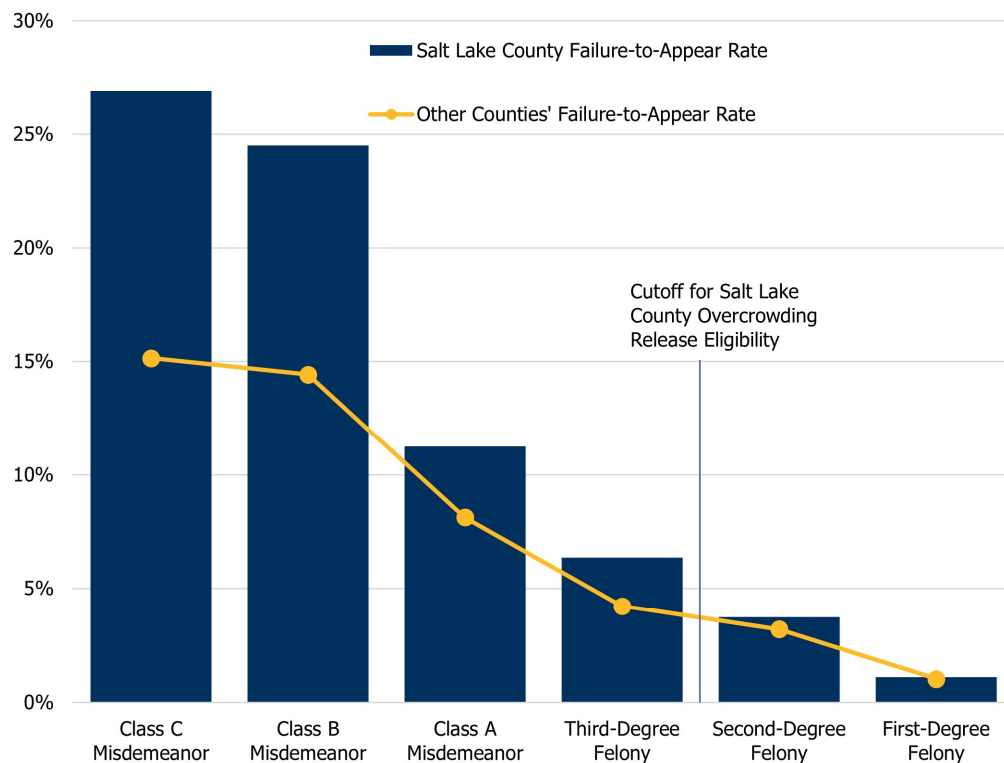
Source: Auditor generated based on Utah Courts data.

¹⁰ The Salt Lake County Jail updated its policy in December 2024 to make individuals with six or more outstanding warrants ineligible for overcrowding release.



Two studies specific to Salt Lake County’s criminal justice system have shown that individuals released for overcrowding fail to appear in court at roughly twice the rate of those discharged through other types of jail releases. Between January 1, 2022, and May 8, 2025, defendants failed to appear at a total of 109,106 court hearings in Salt Lake County. The problem is most acute in justice courts, which handle lower-level crimes. District courts also see the impact, with class A misdemeanor and third-degree felony cases having a higher failure-to-appear rate in Salt Lake County as compared to the rest of the state. The jail typically made inmates eligible for overcrowding release for third-degree felonies and lower. This may help explain the higher failure-to-appear rates observed among those same charge levels, as seen in Figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2 Salt Lake County Defendants’ Failure-to-Appear Rate Is Higher than the Average of All Other Counties. Justice Courts in Salt Lake County see the largest failure-to-appear rates as they handle misdemeanor C and B offenses.



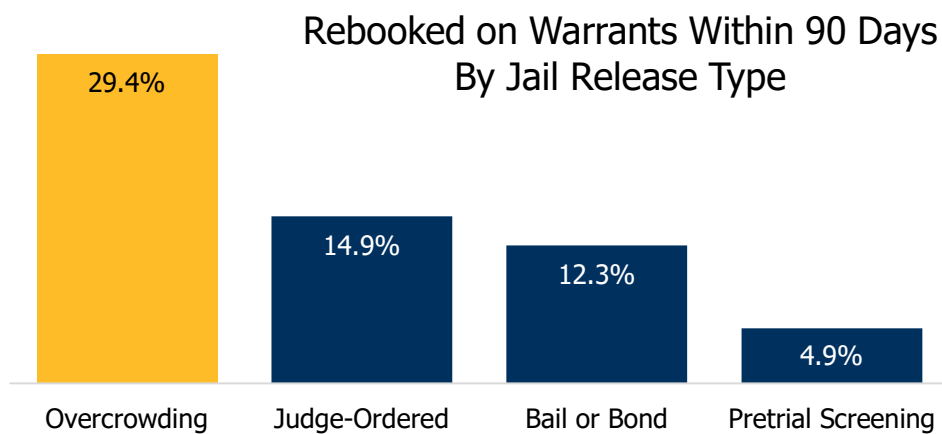
Source: Auditor generated based on Utah Courts Database for hearings from January 1, 2022, to May 8, 2025.

In July 2025, Salt Lake County’s district courts had 8,037 outstanding warrants because of failures to appear. Based on per-capita rates from the rest of Utah, a county with Salt Lake’s population would be expected to have 1,588 fewer district court warrants from defendants who failed to appear.

Many Individuals Are Rebooked into Jail Because They Possess Warrants for Failure to Appear in Court

Many individuals return to jail on warrants for noncompliance or failing to attend court, even though they haven't been arrested on a new charge. Those released due to overcrowding come back to jail with warrants at a higher percentage than other release types. This is seen in the following figure:

Figure 2.3 Individuals Released Due to Overcrowding Often Return to Jail on Warrants. This is a sign that overcrowding releases lead to system inefficiency in Salt Lake County.



Source: Auditor-generated based on Salt Lake County Jail releases between January 1, 2025, and May 31, 2025.

The lack of space creates a recurring cycle: Offenders are released due to jail overcrowding, fail to appear for their scheduled court dates, and subsequently have warrants issued for their arrest. Once re-arrested, they are returned to jail and often released again because of limited space. Half of the 1,785 overcrowding releases in 2025 had been brought to jail on warrants. This places additional strain on the criminal justice system. The U.S. Department of Justice notes the following on this point:

U.S. Dept. of Justice
Jail Capacity Planning Guide

"...in jurisdictions where forced releases have become the norm for managing the jail population, the failure-to-appear rate increased exponentially. In fact, national data indicate that defendants released from jail on forced release are more than twice as likely as those released with pretrial conditions and supervision to have a bench warrant issued because of a failure to appear to court."



This cycle of failing to appear also places a large burden on law enforcement as resources are strained by regular interaction with the same individuals released from jail. It also creates a burden for prosecutors, public defenders, and judges who are already managing heavy caseloads.

Utah Code suggests that sheriffs include “prior instances of failing to appear for a mandatory court appearance” in their written policy governing jail releases. However, it is not required. The jail did not include this provision in their policy or practice for overcrowding release decisions. This contributes to poor court attendance rates. As such, we recommend that the Salt Lake County Sheriff’s Office consider offenders’ failure-to-appear history when releasing individuals due to overcrowding.



The Salt Lake County Jail did not consider an individual’s failure to appear in court when determining whom to release on overcrowding.

RECOMMENDATION 2.1

The Salt Lake County Jail should revise its release policy to include prior instances of failing to appear in court in the release decision process. Including a failure-to-appear element could inform jail managers about who has regularly missed court dates so they can decide whether to release an individual.

2.2 Legislative Action Prompted Salt Lake County to Stop Overcrowding Releases, but Jail Capacity Must Be Addressed to Sustain Progress



House Bill 312 prohibits county jails from overcrowd-releasing repeat offenders and other facing specific charges.

Recent legislation (House Bill 312, 2025 Legislative General Session) prohibits county jails from overcrowd-releasing repeat offenders and others facing specific charges. In response, Salt Lake County passed a sales tax increase to fund the reopening of the last available section of the aging Oxbow Jail.¹¹ The jail also reclaimed space at the larger Salt Lake County Adult Detention Center by discontinuing a contract for a state competency restoration program. Together, these two actions increased capacity by 248 beds and allowed the jail to stop overcrowding releases

¹¹ The county previously planned this action for 2018, then postponed it because of staffing shortages and COVID. The county then permanently cut this funding in the 2024 budget.

on June 1, 2025. In the months that followed, the jail population increased by 248 inmates at its peak. As such, the jail continues to operate near capacity.

Because previous studies in Salt Lake County showed that overcrowding releases lead to high failure-to-appear rates, we evaluated court appearances before and after the jail stopped overcrowding releases on June 1, 2025.

Preliminary data shows that failure-to-appear rates continued to decline in Salt Lake County justice courts after rising in 2024 and beginning to decline when the year ended.

However, further action will be necessary to sustain progress. The condition and design limitations of the 34-year-old Oxbow Jail justify new jail construction. In addition, the Salt Lake County Jail is functionally full¹² even with the recently reopened space as the county population continues to grow. Jail managers acknowledge they may begin releasing some sentenced individuals early as the jail population increases. Statute allows the sheriff to shorten the time of those serving sentences under certain conditions. However, this moves the problem of limited jail space downstream in the process.

Releasing early at the back end rather than at booking is still a symptom of overcrowding. Jail staff remain in a quasi-judicial role by deciding who can have their sentences reduced to make space.

Additionally, the jail should revise its population forecast with the enactment of H.B. 312. In 2023, the county hired a consultant to forecast jail needs and develop a master plan. The report recommended closing the aging Oxbow Jail and increasing the Adult Detention Center by 900 beds. An interview with the consultant found that their jail population forecast did not anticipate the change that was to come with overcrowding releases. With H.B. 312's limits on overcrowding releases, the consultant's forecast likely underestimated the number of jail beds Salt Lake County needs in the future.



In response to H.B. 312, the county reopened 248 jail beds to alleviate overcrowding in the short term. However, further action will be necessary to sustain this progress.

¹² Industry experts and corrections leaders say jails need 10-15% more capacity than their baseline population to accommodate periodic peaks of criminal activity and law enforcement operations, the logistics of operating housing divisions based on gender and security classifications, and facility maintenance.



RECOMMENDATION 2.2

Salt Lake County should revise its jail population forecast to account for changes by House Bill 312. This will help the jail better implement the legislation while the county considers larger action on jail capacity, which is addressed in Chapter 3.

Similar to Chapter 1, the recommendations in this chapter are meant to assist the jail in the short term. However, the fact remains that the jail is inadequately sized and capacity needs to be addressed. In Chapter 3, we offer recommendations for the county to expand jail capacity.





BACKGROUND

After many years of studying problems associated with jail overcrowding, Salt Lake County initiated a voter referendum in 2024 proposing a bond to expand the Adult Detention Center, build a justice and accountability center, and close the aging Oxbow Jail. The measure failed, and county leaders intend to try another referendum in 2026.

FINDING 3.1

Salt Lake County Repeatedly Studied Jail Expansion, but Has Not Increased Capacity in 25 Years

FINDING 3.2

The County Should Consider Alternative Options to Remedy the Overdue Expansion of Jail Capacity

RECOMMENDATION 3.1

Salt Lake County should consider a range of options – including voter referendum, council-authorized bonds, or legislative coordination – to address inadequate jail capacity.

FINDING 3.3

Improved Coordination Among County Leaders Can Ensure Jail Capacity Receives Proper Attention

RECOMMENDATION 3.2

The sheriff should establish metrics and regularly analyze jail data in areas such as recidivism.

RECOMMENDATION 3.3

The county mayor should coordinate with the sheriff to assess jail needs. This may require independently evaluating jail needs separate from public safety funding.

RECOMMENDATION 3.4

The county council could provide forums for the independently elected officials, such as the sheriff, to collaborate on funding needs for the jail outside of the mayor's budget.



CONCLUSION

Salt Lake County is making investments in housing and support services to address homeless-related criminal behavior. We recognize that housing resources play a key role in alternative-to-incarceration programs. However, these efforts have not been matched by sufficient attention to the county's jail capacity challenges. A more balanced approach is needed.





Chapter 3

Salt Lake County Has Not Made Jail Capacity a Priority

Salt Lake County has repeatedly been warned of the need to build new jail capacity yet took no effective action. The county has experienced a growing population and high crime rates, but has not expanded the jail to account for these trends. As seen in previous chapters, the negative effects of an inadequately sized jail require that Salt Lake County address jail capacity. We provide options that the county and the Legislature can consider to fix this problem. Additional recommendations are provided to help county leaders better plan and collaborate on jail needs for the future.

3.1 Salt Lake County Repeatedly Studied Jail Expansion but Has Not Increased Capacity in 25 Years

In 2015, Utah passed the Justice Reinvestment Initiative (JRI), which moved low-level offenders out of the state prison system. The JRI changed the dynamics of county corrections systems. Even so, Salt Lake County has been aware of jail overcrowding since at least 2007. Over the past 14 years, the county initiated four formal studies that pointed to the need to expand the jail:

- 2011 and 2015: External reviews emphasized that overcrowding led to high recidivism and missed court appearances.
- 2017: An internal county committee recommended building two housing pods at the jail to address overcrowding.
- 2023-24: The county commissioned a corrections master plan, which again recommended expanding the jail.



Salt Lake County has been aware of jail overcrowding since at least 2007. The county has also initiated four studies that pointed to a need to expand the jail.

The following figure shows the different studies and their recommendations:

Figure 3.1 Salt Lake County Initiated Four In-Depth Reviews that Showed the Need to Expand the Jail. Each review mentions the consequences of overcrowding.

External Review	External Review	Internal Report	External Review
2011	2015	2017	2024
Overcrowding releases should stop because they lead to more crime and erode the criminal justice system.	High-risk offenders are getting released with no supervision because of overcrowding.	The county should build two new pods at the jail because overcrowding makes alternatives to incarceration less effective.	The county should close Oxbow and expand the larger jail by 900 beds.

Source: Auditor generated from previous reviews of Salt Lake County’s jail and criminal justice system.

Following the 2024 study, the county decided to take some action on jail capacity. The county initiated a voter referendum proposing a bond to expand the adult detention center, build a justice and accountability center, and close the aging Oxbow Jail. Voters narrowly rejected the measure in November 2024. Subsequent legislation in 2025 limited overcrowding releases. As a response to both the failed referendum and the new legislation, the county approved a sales tax increase to re-open the final section of the aging Oxbow jail and reclaim space at the Adult Detention Center. These moves increased capacity by 248 beds. However, this measure is only a short-term response to a larger issue.

The county indicates that it will try another referendum in 2026 to address jail capacity, although the details of this future referendum are not established. The county should have taken a more proactive approach to ensure jail capacity kept pace with the county’s population growth and criminal justice needs.

Population Growth and Crime Rates Should Be Considered When Determining Adequate Jail Capacity

Population forecasts anticipated high growth for Salt Lake County. However, due to inaction, the county fell further behind on jail capacity as the population grew. Salt Lake County has added 300,000 residents since the jail was built in 2000. For perspective, 300,000 is a little more than the population of Weber County, which has 888 jail beds to serve its population. Salt Lake County effectively added the population equivalent of Weber County—but did so without building a single new jail bed.



Salt Lake County should have taken a more proactive approach so that jail capacity kept pace with population growth and the criminal justice system’s needs.



To match national averages, Salt Lake County would need 668 additional jail beds per capita.¹³ Even then, it would still fall short of the capacity levels of two comparison counties from Utah. Like Salt Lake County, Washington and Weber Counties have rapidly growing populations with moderate crime rates. However, both Weber and Washington Counties have sufficient jail capacity for the growing demands on their criminal justice systems.

Figure 3.2 Salt Lake County Lags Behind on Jail Capacity Levels Despite Having High Crime Rates. Weber and Washington Counties are included because they share key population characteristics with Salt Lake County.

	Salt Lake County	Washington County	Weber County	United States
Jail Beds per 100,000 Residents	217	316 ¹⁴	322	272
Crime Rate per 1,000 Residents	67.5	41.9	51.1	National Rate Not Reported

Source: Auditor generated based on data from jail commanders in Utah, the Bureau of Justice Statistics Annual Survey of Jails, the U.S. Census, and the Utah Department of Public Safety.

Increasing crime rates are both a driver and a consequence of inadequate jail capacity. High crime rates should be a key consideration in jail expansion efforts.¹⁵ At the same time, failure to address overcrowding can contribute to increased crime as shown in Chapter 1. This risk was identified by the 2011 study of Salt Lake County’s criminal justice system. Today, Salt Lake County’s crime rate is 69 percent higher than the average for the rest of the state. Strategic planning to expand jail capacity is essential to break this cycle and support a more effective criminal justice system.



Salt Lake County’s crime rate is 69 percent higher than the average for the rest of the state.

¹³ These numbers align with views expressed by jail staff and leadership we interviewed. Most told us that the jail needed between 500 and 1,000 additional beds to meet the county’s needs.

¹⁴ Washington County makes some jail beds available to the Utah Department of Corrections. In the event the county needed those beds back, the Sheriff’s office reports they would cancel the state contract and begin jail expansion plans.

¹⁵ The U.S. Department of Justice’s *Jail Capacity Planning Guide* states that jail space needs are primarily a function of population trends, crime rates, and system policies.

With a growing population and two aging facilities that are functionally full, Salt Lake County needs to increase capacity. An adequately sized jail is necessary for the criminal justice system to function effectively.¹⁶

3.2 The County Should Consider Alternative Options to Remedy the Overdue Expansion of Jail Capacity

While going to referendum in 2026 for general obligation bonds is an option, the county needs to be prepared to act on jail capacity if another ballot referendum fails. This section provides some options Salt Lake County and the Legislature could consider to address jail capacity needs.



There are other methods for counties to increase jail capacity beyond voter referendums.

Some Utah Counties Have Used Methods Beyond Voter Referendums to Increase Jail Capacity

We reviewed two Utah counties that are currently undertaking a jail expansion. Washington and Iron Counties both acted when they recognized population growth and inadequate facilities.



Washington County

Washington County—Jail leadership and the county commission collaborated to increase jail capacity as the population increases. The commission reserved approximately \$28 million through federal relief funding for a jail expansion. This funding allowed the county to begin construction of a 150-bed expansion, including a 64-bed medical unit at the Purgatory Correctional Facility. This expansion increases Washington County’s jail capacity by 30 percent. We interviewed jail officials and observed the construction of the new jail facilities. Jail leadership reported that they have taken these proactive steps to help the jail keep pace with the county’s rapidly increasing population.



Iron County

Iron County—The county’s jail reached capacity around 2016. Like Salt Lake, Iron County also held a public referendum to increase capacity in 2023. Yet only 36.2 percent of voters supported the measure to replace it. In 2024, the Legislature passed a law allowing smaller counties to use local sales tax revenue for public safety initiatives. Recognizing the county’s urgent situation, Iron County used this

¹⁶ The scope of the expansion should be guided by an updated jail population forecast as recommended in Chapter 2.



option in May 2024 to issue revenue bonds for a new 650-bed facility.¹⁷ This increase will more than triple the county’s capacity. Construction on the new facility began in August 2024.

Arizona Law Allows Counties to Levy a Jail-Specific Facilities Tax

The Arizona Legislature created an option for the state’s counties to authorize a jail-specific facilities tax with voter approval. Maricopa County, the state’s largest county, recognized significant population growth and adopted this tax in 1998. The county collects a one-fifth of one cent (\$0.002) jail excise tax and mandates that the funding be transferred from the general fund to a detention fund. These detention funds are intended to support jail facilities, including construction and maintenance, as well as programs aimed at reducing facility expenses. For example, the county recently completed a \$185 million jail without the issuance of bonds. This new facility opened in 2020 with 1,280 beds for long-term stays, a 512-bed holding area for short-term detainees, a central intake, and four courtrooms for on-site hearings. Maricopa County recognized the positive impact of the tax by drawing connections between public safety and economic growth. In a December 2024 report, the county noted that the jail tax had positive implications for economic development:



The Arizona Legislature created an option for the state’s counties to authorize a jail-specific facilities tax.

Maricopa County, Arizona
Public Safety Funding Report

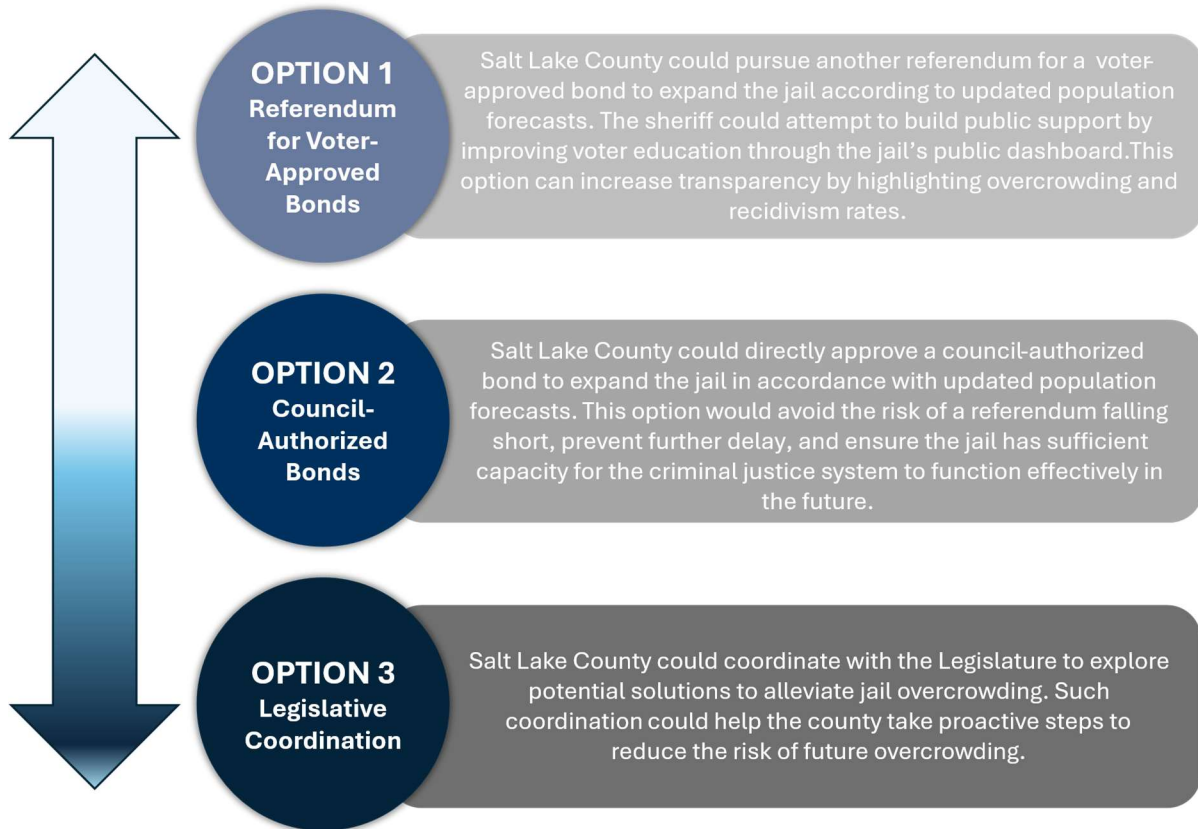
"Many factors impact an economy’s ability to grow and prosper. An ineffective criminal justice system that results in higher rates of crime and fewer safety assurances for businesses will have a negative impact on economic development growth. This will impact County revenue collections in other areas beyond those related to the jail tax."

Salt Lake County and the Legislature Could Consider Multiple Options to Expand Inadequate Jail Capacity

As demonstrated in the previous sections, a county can take multiple avenues to support jail expansion. The Legislature could also consider providing an alternative path for counties to fund jail facilities. We present the following recommendations as a list of options, listed in increasing order of policy

¹⁷ Utah Code allows local governments to authorize bonds through alternatives to voter-approved general obligation bonds, such as lease-revenue bonds.

boldness—from the most publicly responsive to the most structurally transformative:



RECOMMENDATION 3.1

Salt Lake County leaders should consider the options presented in this chapter. The first two options could be addressed by the county. The third option would require coordination with the Legislature.

3.3 Improved Coordination Among County Leaders Can Ensure Jail Capacity Receives Proper Attention

Salt Lake County is making investments in housing and support services to address homeless-related criminal behavior. We recognize that housing resources play a key role in alternative-to-incarceration programs. However, these efforts have not been matched by sufficient attention to the county’s jail capacity challenges. A more balanced approach is needed. County leaders



should consider both the consequences of limited jail space and the value of alternative-to-incarceration programs as a broader approach to criminal justice.¹⁸

Most Individuals Released Due to Overcrowding Were Not Homeless, And Some Committed More Serious Offenses After Being Released

Jail administrators and other county leaders commonly told us that overcrowding releases primarily involve homeless individuals who continually re-commit low-level nuisance crimes. This perception holds that lower-level criminals can be released without a significant impact on the community. We found that this belief was only partially accurate. Re-arrest data between 2022 and 2025 shows that homeless individuals make up 42 percent of overcrowding releases. Many of these offenders repeat a pattern of drug, theft, and trespassing charges that county leaders refer to as low-level offenses. However, more individuals released by overcrowding—58 percent—were not homeless. Both housed and homeless individuals were charged with committing severe crimes shortly after being released from jail, as seen in Figure 3.3:



Re-arrest data between 2022 and 2025 shows that homeless individuals make up 42 percent of overcrowding releases. Most individuals released by overcrowding were not homeless.

Figure 3.3 Housed Individuals Constitute a Larger Number of Overcrowding Releases than Homeless Individuals. Since 2022, there were 344 incidents of an individual committing a first- or second-degree felony soon after an overcrowding release.

	Homeless	Not Homeless
Overcrowding Releases between January 2022 and May 2025	5,780	7,835
Number Arrested on 1st or 2nd Degree Felony Charges Within 90 Days of the Overcrowding Release	141	203

Source: Auditor generated based on data from the Salt Lake County Jail.

The county’s perception about overcrowding releases is shaped largely by homeless-related criminal behavior. In fact, the county’s current criminal justice action plan places significant emphasis on housing assistance and treatment programs yet makes little mention of jail capacity. A comprehensive strategy should focus on both support services and adequate jail capacity to ensure

¹⁸ See “A Review of Salt Lake County’s Criminal Justice System,” (#2025-32).

accountability for non-compliance.¹⁹ We provide recommendations for county policymakers to better plan for future jail needs.

County Officials Can Better Coordinate To Plan for Future Jail Capacity Needs



Utah Code establishes that sheriffs are elected officials with primary responsibility for addressing jail needs. The current sheriff, Rosie Rivera, has consistently emphasized

alternatives to incarceration. This emphasis includes alternatives for individuals who are not a public safety threat and those whose crimes are related to mental health. After being elected as sheriff in 2017, Rivera said,

“Sometimes there are other resources and I’m going to try to work with the mayor’s office and the council to try to find alternatives to jail.”

Sheriff Rivera inherited an overcrowded jail, and efforts to address it were delayed because filling staff positions proved to be a challenge early in her tenure. We believe the sheriff should lead the charge for jail expansion as a core component of a broader strategy that includes alternatives to incarceration.

The sheriff’s statutory authority uniquely positions her to take the lead in planning and advocating for jail needs. Regular data evaluations could provide policymakers with sufficient information to make funding decisions for the jail. Key metrics could include the annual number of overcrowding releases, overcrowding recidivism rates, or jail capacity compared to crime rates.

RECOMMENDATION 3.2

The sheriff, as the elected officer over the jail, should establish metrics and regularly analyze jail data in areas such as recidivism rates. This data can be presented to other county officials to help inform jail capacity needs.

¹⁹ The lack of accountability due to the jail’s lack of space is seen in Chapters 1 and 2.



County mayor Jenny Wilson prepares and proposes an annual county budget to the county council which includes the jail’s budget. Like the sheriff, the mayor emphasizes alternatives to

incarceration. For example, in 2024, she launched an initiative called the Human Services, Homelessness, and Criminal Justice Reform Action Plan. Though details are not finalized, the plan involves hundreds of millions of dollars to construct housing for individuals who face homelessness and mental health challenges. The housing includes 270 units focused on support services for “those with criminal involvement and experiencing homelessness or housing instability.”

The action plan only briefly mentions jail expansion that would have been funded separately as part of the 2024 ballot initiative. While investments in housing and behavioral health are needed, addressing the county’s criminal justice challenges will require a balanced approach that includes ensuring adequate jail capacity.



While investments in housing and behavioral health are needed, addressing the county’s criminal justice challenges will require a balanced approach that includes ensuring adequate jail capacity.

RECOMMENDATION 3.3

The county mayor should coordinate with the sheriff to assess jail needs. This may require independently evaluating jail needs separate from public safety funding. This will better inform the mayor’s budget on jail needs and resources.



The Salt Lake County Council authorizes county spending, including for the jail. In contrast to full-time elected officials, the county council is a part-time position. Its primary role is to approve, modify, or deny funding requests from the mayor’s budget. Interviewed council members report that they believe the sheriff is responsible for advocating jail needs.

The council can make independent decisions on funding requests. For example, some council members have made it a priority to limit new spending. One council member cited cost concerns as a reason the council did not pursue an alternative funding option after voters rejected the 2024 bond. While a voter

referendum authorizes general obligation bonds, the county council has the authority to issue revenue bonds directly.²⁰



The county council plays an important role in ensuring that jail capacity is sufficient for the county's criminal justice system. It can work collaboratively with the sheriff and the mayor to forecast future jail needs.

The county council plays an important role in ensuring that jail capacity is sufficient for the county's criminal justice system. For example, the county council recently took initiative by voting to implement a new sales tax following the referendum failure. The new tax funds were used to open the final pod at the Oxbow facility. While the council initiated this action, it was a reaction to legislative changes. We believe the county council can exhibit proactive leadership by working collaboratively with the sheriff and the mayor to forecast future jail needs. The

council can also provide an independent forum for the sheriff and jail staff to plan, forecast, and fund jail resources.

RECOMMENDATION 3.4

The county council could provide forums for independently elected officials, such as the sheriff, to collaborate on funding needs for the jail outside of the mayor's budget. This forum could provide a setting for the sheriff to share data and collaborate with policymakers on future jail planning.

²⁰ Salt Lake County's chief financial officer stated that the higher interest rate associated with revenue bonds would increase a \$600 million bond by \$6 million.



Complete List of Audit Recommendations





Complete List of Audit Recommendations

This report made the following seven 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 Salt Lake County Jail should use risk assessments that consider offender history when it needs to release individuals due to overcrowding. The use of an assessment minimizes the chance of violent and high-risk offenders being released back into the community.

Recommendation 2.1

The Salt Lake County Jail should revise its release policy to include prior instances of failing to appear in court in the release decision process. Including a failure-to-appear element could inform jail managers about who has regularly missed court dates so they can decide whether to release an individual.

Recommendation 2.2

Salt Lake County should revise its jail population forecast to account for changes by House Bill 312. This will help the jail better implement the legislation while the county considers larger action on jail capacity, which is addressed in Chapter 3.

Recommendation 3.1

Salt Lake County leaders should consider the options presented in this chapter. The first two options could be addressed by the county. The third option would require coordination with the Legislature.

Recommendation 3.2

The sheriff, as the elected officer over the jail, should establish metrics and regularly analyze jail data in areas such as recidivism rates. This data can be presented to other county officials to help inform jail capacity needs.

Recommendation 3.3

The county mayor should coordinate with the sheriff to assess jail needs. This may require independently evaluating jail needs separate from public safety funding. This will better inform the mayor's budget on jail needs and resources.

Recommendation 3.4

The county council could provide forums for independently elected officials, such as the sheriff, to collaborate on funding needs for the jail outside of the mayor's budget. This forum could provide a setting for the sheriff to share data and collaborate with policymakers on future jail planning.





Agency Response Plan



SALT LAKE COUNTY
S H E R I F F ' S O F F I C E

Rosa M. 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
Office of the Legislative Auditor General Utah State Capitol Complex
Rebecca Lockheart House Building, Suite W315
PO Box 145315
Salt Lake City, UT 84114-5315

Dear Mr. Minchey,

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the *Performance Audit of the Salt Lake County Jail: The Impact of Insufficient Jail Capacity on Criminal Justice Outcomes (Report No. 2025-30)*. We appreciate your team's professionalism and the insight this audit provides into how limited jail capacity affects outcomes across the county's criminal justice system.

The Salt Lake County Sheriff's Office concurs with all recommendations. The steps outlined in our responses will strengthen short-term operations, however, as noted in the audit, the jail remains undersized for the volume and complexity of individuals entering the system, and both facilities are aging and face significant deferred maintenance.

For more than 20 years, the jail has not had adequate capacity to meet community demand. As a result, it has historically relied on overcrowd releases to manage population pressures rather than implementing booking restrictions. Since 2011, eligibility for these releases has been based on the current booking charge. No overcrowd releases have occurred since June 1, 2025, following the Salt Lake County Council's approval of a sales tax option that funded the remaining beds at the Oxbow facility. Today, approximately 25% of the population consists of sentenced individuals and 75% are pre-trial detainees, with the jail operating at 91% to 95% capacity on most days.

The Sheriff's Office is participating in the Mayor's Systemic Coordination meetings to help develop a plan for increased jail capacity for consideration in a 2026 bond proposal. As part of this effort, the County is contracting with the Leifman Group to integrate expanded treatment options for individuals in the criminal

justice system who have mental health and substance-use needs. This work builds on the Miami-Dade County model, which has successfully reduced recidivism.

While the 2024 bond proposal included an 800-bed expansion, those numbers are being reassessed to account for new limits on overcrowd releases and continued population growth. The Sheriff's Office will continue advocating for the additional beds needed to meet demand in the 2026 proposal and will also work with the County Council to explore alternative funding options. Because expansion will take several years, we will work with our criminal justice partners on interim solutions to ease capacity pressures and reduce reliance on overcrowd releases.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide our response. We look forward to continued collaboration with your office and the Legislature as Salt Lake County advances long-term, sustainable solutions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rosa M. Rivera".

Rosa M. Rivera
Salt Lake County Sheriff

CHAPTER 1

RECOMMENDATION 1.1 - *The Salt Lake County Jail should use risk assessments that consider offender history when it needs to release individuals due to overcrowding. The use of an assessment minimizes the chance of violent and high-risk offenders being released back into the community.*

Agency Response: The agency concurs with the recommendation and will implement a public safety assessment to guide decisions when the jail must release individuals due to overcrowding.

What: The Salt Lake County Jail will adopt a public safety assessment that evaluates risks of reoffense, history of violence, and criminal background. The assessment will be formally incorporated into the jail's overcrowding release process.

How:

- Adopt a public safety assessment tool capable of measuring risk of reoffense, history of violence, and criminal background.
- Integrate the assessment into booking and processing workflows.
- Provide comprehensive staff training for processing personnel and supervisors on administering the tool, interpreting scoring criteria, and documenting decisions.
- Update policies and procedures to reflect the required use of the assessment for all overcrowding release considerations.
- Develop a method to conduct periodic reviews to ensure consistent application, identify discrepancies, and incorporate improvements.

When:

- January 2026: Begin the process of adopting an assessment tool; draft policy and procedural updates for incorporating the assessment into overcrowding release decisions; develop a method to conduct periodic reviews
- March 2026: Train staff and implement the assessment within jail workflows for overcrowd releases decisions

Documentation:

- Salt Lake County Jail Policy Manual
- Training records and attendance logs
- Assessment tool implementation guidelines
- Documentation of assessment results within release decision files

Contact: Corrections Chief Deputy Matt Dumont, 385-468-8795, MDumont@saltlakecounty.gov; Salt Lake County Sheriff Rosie Rivera, 385-468-9901, RRivera@saltlakecounty.gov

CHAPTER 2

RECOMMENDATION 2.1 - *The Salt Lake County Jail should revise its release policy to include prior instances of failing to appear in court in the release decision process. Including a failure-to-appear element could inform jail managers about who has regularly missed court dates so it can decide whether to release an individual.*

Agency Response: The agency concurs with the recommendation and will incorporate prior failures to appear into the overcrowding release decision process alongside a public safety assessment tool.

What: The Salt Lake County Jail will revise its overcrowding release policy to require review of an individual's prior failures to appear in court as part of release determination. This information will be used in conjunction with a public safety assessment.

How:

- Update jail overcrowding release policies to include evaluation of previous failures to appear and related court-compliance history.
- Coordinate with District Court and Justice Court partners to obtain clearer and more consistent access to failure to appear information that is not always identifiable at booking.
 - Only some warrants appear in the system specifically as “failure to appear.” The jail will work with courts to develop a method for flagging individuals whose warrants or histories reflect repeated failures to appear.
- Integrate failure to appear data into the jail's release decision workflow alongside a public safety assessment tool.
- Train jail processing staff on where to locate failure to appear information, how to interpret it, how it interacts with the assessment tool, and how to apply it consistently during overcrowding release decisions.
- Develop a method to conduct periodic reviews to confirm failure to appear information is being used consistently in release determinations.

When:

- January 2026: Meet with the 3rd District Court during the monthly coordination meeting to begin establishing failure to appear identification process
- February 2026: Schedule a meeting with the Justice Courts to create similar processes for identifying and sharing failure to appear information
- April 2026 (timeline may shift based on conversations with the courts): Integrate failure to appear criteria into updated release procedures, staff training (in alignment with the implementation timeline for the public safety assessment), and periodic reviews

Documentation:

- Salt Lake County Jail Policy Manual
- Agreements with District and Justice Courts regarding failure to appear information
- Staff training records documenting instruction on using failure to appear data
- Release decision files demonstrating use of failure to appear information

Contact: Corrections Chief Deputy Matt Dumont, 385-468-8795, MDumont@saltlakecounty.gov; Salt Lake County Sheriff Rosie Rivera, 385-468-9901, RRivera@saltlakecounty.gov

RECOMMENDATION 2.2 - *Salt Lake County should revise its jail population forecast to account for changes by House Bill 312. This will help the jail better implement the legislation while the county considers larger action on jail capacity, which is addressed in Chapter 3.*

Agency Response: The agency concurs with the recommendation and will revise the jail population forecast to reflect the operational changes resulting from House Bill 312 and the Salt Lake County Sheriff's Office's goal of ending overcrowding releases.

What: The Sheriff's Office will update its jail population forecast to incorporate the statutory impacts of House Bill 312 and the ongoing efforts to end overcrowding releases.

How:

- Collaborate with CGL Companies (CGL) to model updated jail population trends. A kickoff meeting occurred on November 7, 2025, with a follow-up meeting on November 26, 2025.
- Analyze HB 312 impacts, including increases in booking volume, changes in overcrowd release requirements, and anticipated longer lengths of stay for individuals who previously would have been released.
- Evaluate the impact of discontinuing overcrowding releases on average daily population and bed capacity.
- Integrate forecasting results into long-term planning, including the 2026 bond discussions, expansion scenarios, resource needs, and operational budgeting.
- Coordinate findings with the County Council, County Mayor, and criminal justice system partners to inform broader system planning and expansion decisions.

When:

- January 2026: CGL is expected to complete population forecast and present updated projections to the Sheriff's Office and County leadership.
- February–June 2026: Incorporate findings into ongoing planning for jail expansion and interim capacity strategies, and FY27 budget development.

Documentation:

- CGL Jail Population Forecast Report
- Updated planning documents reflecting revised population projections

Contact: Corrections Chief Deputy Matt Dumont, 385-468-8795, MDumont@saltlakecounty.gov; Salt Lake County Sheriff Rosie Rivera, 385-468-9901, RRivera@saltlakecounty.gov

CHAPTER 3

RECOMMENDATION 3.1 - *Salt Lake County should consider a range of options– including voter referendum, council-authorized bonds, or legislative coordination – to address inadequate jail capacity.*

Agency Response: The agency concurs with the recommendation and will continue working collaboratively with the Salt Lake County Council and Mayor on long-term strategies to address jail capacity needs and ensure policymakers have the information required to evaluate funding options.

What: The Salt Lake County Sheriff's Office will work with County leadership to evaluate funding mechanisms for increasing jail capacity and provide ongoing data and operational analysis to support informed policymaking.

How:

- Collaborate with the County Council, County Mayor, and key partners to assess the full range of financing options for jail expansion, including the planned 2026 bond proposal and alternative funding pathways.
- Provide updated population forecasts, operational data, and capacity analyses to policymakers.
- Participate in the Systemic Coordination meeting, which is analyzing future bond structure, treatment integration, and the scope of expansion needed.
- Shift from annual to quarterly updates to the County Council and Mayor during Council meetings on jail population trends, capacity pressures, and operational impacts.

When:

- March 2026, June 2026, September 2026, December 2026: Quarterly updates to the County Council and Mayor
- Ongoing: Continuous collaboration with County leadership as expansion planning progresses

Documentation:

- Quarterly Jail Capacity and Population presentations to the County Council and Mayor

Contact: Salt Lake County Sheriff Rosie Rivera, 385-468-9901, RRivera@saltlakecounty.gov

RECOMMENDATION 3.2 - *The sheriff should establish metrics and regularly analyze jail data in areas such as recidivism rates.*

Agency Response: The agency concurs with the recommendation and will expand its data collection and analysis to include recidivism rates.

What: The Sheriff's Office will implement a standardized set of jail performance metrics, including a formal definition of recidivism, and will regularly analyze and present these metrics to the County Council and Mayor during quarterly updates.

How:

- Conduct formal monthly data review meetings between the Sheriff and the Corrections Bureau Chief Deputy to evaluate operational trends, population pressures, recidivism indicators, and other key metrics.

- Develop and adopt a definition of recidivism in partnership with the County’s Criminal Justice Advisory Council (CJAC) that can be applied consistently across all reporting and dashboard systems.
- Expand the existing Jail Dashboard (launched August 2019) in coordination with CJAC to include additional measures, such as:
 - Recidivism rates
 - Annual number of overcrowding releases
 - Jail capacity compared to crime trends and booking volumes
- Request the reclassification of an existing vacant FTE to a dedicated data analyst position.
- Incorporate information into quarterly updates presented to the County Council and Mayor.

When:

- January 2026: Begin monthly data review meetings between the Sheriff and the Corrections Bureau Chief Deputy; Work with Sheriff’s HR, County HR, and Sheriff’s Fiscal to request reclassification of an existing vacant FTE to a dedicated data analyst position; Collaborate with CJAC partners on recidivism definition and incorporating new metrics into the Jail Dashboard
- March 2026, June 2026, September 2026, December 2026: Quarterly updates to the County Council and Mayor

Documentation:

- Quarterly Jail Capacity and Population presentations to the Mayor and County Council
- Data Analyst Reclassification Request to Council
- Data Analyst Job Posting
- Jail Dashboard: <https://www.saltlakecounty.gov/sheriff/corrections/jail/>

Contact: Salt Lake County Sheriff Rosie Rivera, 385-468-9901, RRivera@saltlakecounty.gov

***RECOMMENDATION 3.3** - The county mayor should coordinate with the sheriff to assess jail needs. This may require independently evaluating jail needs separate from public safety funding.*

Agency Response: The agency concurs with the recommendation and is committed to ongoing collaboration between the County Mayor and the Sheriff’s Office to evaluate the jail’s needs and funding options to meet those needs. The Sheriff’s Office will support the mayor’s efforts and defers additional details to the County Mayor.

Contact: Salt Lake County Sheriff Rosie Rivera, 385-468-9901, RRivera@saltlakecounty.gov

***RECOMMENDATION 3.4** - The county council could provide forums for the independently elected officials, such as the sheriff, to collaborate on funding needs for the jail outside of the mayor’s budget.*

Agency Response: The agency concurs with the recommendation and is committed to ongoing collaboration with the County Council on jail funding. The Sheriff’s Office will support the Council’s efforts and defers further details to the County Council.

Contact: Salt Lake County Sheriff Rosie Rivera, 385-468-9901, RRivera@saltlakecounty.gov





December 2, 2025

Office of the Legislative Auditor General
Attn: Kade Minchey, Auditor General
W315 State Capitol Complex,
Salt Lake City, UT 84114

Dear Auditor General Minchey,

As Chair of the Salt Lake County Council, I want to acknowledge receipt of your findings and on behalf of the County Council, would like to express our appreciation for the time and effort that went into this legislative audit for the jail. I recognize that it was a complex and detailed review requiring substantial analysis to understand the processes and funding needs associated with public safety in Salt Lake County. I value the findings and appreciate the engagement from legislators regarding public safety and the needs at the jail in Salt Lake County.

Public safety and the operational needs of the jail remain top priorities for the County Council. While we awaited the public's decision on the 2024 jail bond initiative, individual members of the Council were actively engaged in extensive discussions with relevant stakeholders about the alternative steps that would be necessary should the bond fail. Although much of this work occurred outside the public eye, these discussions were ongoing and deliberate.

My understanding is that while your final audit report is largely focused on the Salt Lake County Sheriff and Jail, it does contain a recommendation that the County Council establish a forum for independently elected officials, such as the Sheriff, to collaborate and coordinate on jail funding needs outside of the Mayor's budget process. I agree this recommendation will strengthen communication, support long-term planning, and help ensure the County continues to meet its public safety responsibilities. I will work with my colleagues on the Council to schedule recommended public meetings with the Sheriff and others during 2026 and beyond. My Council colleagues will certainly have their own perspectives about this process consistent with their roles as members of an elected legislative body, and I'll look forward to collaborating with them after they have had an opportunity to receive your final report and findings.

Thank you again for your thoughtful work and partnership.

Best regards,

Dea Theodore
Chairwoman Salt Lake County Council

Dea Theodore
District 6, Chair

Laurie Stringham
At-Large A

Suzanne Harrison
At-Large B

Natalie Pinkney
At-Large C

Jiro Johnson
District 1

Carlos Moreno
District 2

Aimee Winder Newton
District 3

Ross Romero
District 4

Sheldon Stewart
District 5





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