

One of the worst things that can happen for public safety is for a county to run out of jail space. Unfortunately, Platte County is wandering down that dangerous path. Our jail—which was built 26 years ago—is past its planned capacity. It's vital that we have sufficient jail space for violent criminals and people who refuse to appear for court unless they're behind bars.

It's not surprising that we've exceeded the capacity of the jail. Platte County is the fastest growing county in Missouri. Although I wasn't yet in office when the existing jail was built, I'm told it was planned as a 20-year solution. We're now in year 26 of that 20-year solution.

Make no mistake, we've worked hard to keep as many people out of our jail as possible. Platte County offers all four of the major treatment courts—drug, DUI, veterans, and mental health treatment programs. Treatment courts reduce incarceration by utilizing intensive probation and treatment requirements, decreasing both the number of people in jail and recidivism. Addressing people's underlying substance abuse or mental health problems pays long-term dividends.

I'm also proud of the Platte CARES program, which I started in 2021. CARES is an acronym for Community Alternative with Restorative and Educational Services. This prosecutor-led diversion program offers first-time, nonviolent misdemeanor or felony offenders the opportunity to avoid a criminal record if they admit their wrongdoing, perform community service, remain crime and drug-free, work or continue their education, and pay any restitution that is owed. Similar to our treatment courts, two of the goals of the program are to decrease our jail population and keep people from entering a life of crime.

Since 2011, more than 500 people have graduated from the treatment courts or Platte CARES programs. That is a remarkable number, and it has decreased the jail population. But our jail remains full.

We must have enough jail cells for violent and dangerous offenders and people who have proven they won't show up for court unless they are in jail. Despite the success of treatment courts and Platte CARES, Platte County's existing jail remains overcrowded, leading to unsafe conditions for both inmates and staff. The jail also lacks sufficient space to provide adequate services and rehabilitation programs. An expanded detention facility would provide more space, reduce overcrowding, allow for better segregation of different classes of inmates, and include dedicated spaces like classrooms, therapy rooms, and medical facilities for treatment and rehabilitation programs.

Balancing the need for a new jail with effective treatment and diversion programs is crucial to the well-being of Platte County. Investing in both infrastructure and supportive services will help create a more just and efficient criminal justice system. The expansion of the detention facility should be seen as an opportunity to incorporate modern facilities designed to keep dangerous offenders locked up and also support rehabilitation efforts for offenders—almost all of whom will return to our streets at some point. A portion of the new jail would be dedicated to treatment programs, educational opportunities, and vocational training, thereby addressing the underlying issues that often lead to criminal behavior. That's good for everyone involved.

I encourage you to learn more about the ballot questions at <https://www.co.platte.mo.us/jail>.

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