

RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, Travis County has a statutory responsibility and duty to “provide safe and suitable jails for the county” and the Travis County Commissioners Court takes that responsibility seriously.

WHEREAS, the county developed a 20-year plan, 5 years ago in 2016. Building a new jail for women was an initial step in the plan, but it doesn’t need to be.

WHEREAS, when originally developed, the plan was based on a jail population of over 2,800 people (about 450 women). Today the full jail population sits at about 1,450 (about 150 women). Dramatic reductions in the jail population from 2015 until now have made it unnecessary to start with construction of a new women’s jail.

WHEREAS, 70% of the people in Travis County jail are people of color compared to 49% overall and 58% of the women in Travis County jail are women of color (89/154).

WHEREAS, on average, 65% of the women in the Travis County jail are there for three days or less and of the remaining 35%, nearly 45% have a mental health designation code. Travis County does not identify people entering the jail system with substance use disorder, but statewide statistics suggest that two-thirds of people in jail have a substance use disorder.

WHEREAS, the 65% of women in jail for less than 3 days need access to stable housing, good jobs, childcare and healthcare outside of a jail setting. This will make our community more safe and families more stable as a result.

WHEREAS, nationally, 80% of women in jail are mothers and the majority are the primary wage earners for their family,¹ and 75% reported employment in the month prior to arrest.

WHEREAS, according to the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics at the US Department of Justice, Black children (6.7%) were seven and a half times more likely than white children (0.9%) to have a parent in prison. Hispanic children (2.4%) were more than two and a half times more likely than white children to have a parent in prison.

WHEREAS, even one day in jail has the potential to destabilize an entire family by risking housing, jobs, and even child custody.²

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, the Travis County Commissioners Court directs county staff to provide a report by July 15, 2021 that:

1. Includes a proposal for the development of a new strategic plan and vision, previously called “Master Plan,” for the county’s criminal justice complex to replace the Travis County Adult Correctional System Needs Analysis and Master Plan; and
2. Convenes a “working group to reduce the number of women in the jail” as recommended in the Designing & Planning a New Women’s Jail Facility For Travis County: A Roadmap for Reform report of the Advisory Committee to the Travis County Sheriff’s Office; and
3. Provides recommendations and options to Court for how to begin providing better physical, mental, and behavioral health care in the existing jail, this may include providing an additional psychiatrist in the jail, medication assisted treatment, or additional trauma informed training for all corrections staff and what is the continuum needed to ensure access for these services within the community.