

AUDIT PROPOSAL

Community Mental Health: Evaluating Mental Health Services in Local Jails

SOURCE

This audit proposal was requested by Representative Elizabeth Bishop.

BACKGROUND

Individuals who have been convicted of misdemeanors or are being held pending a trial or other legal proceeding are held in local county or city jails. Many individuals who are held in local jails may require mental health services. Upon admission to a jail, staff may conduct a suicide screening or seek additional information about an individual's mental health, but these actions are not typically required. Studies have found that up to 64% of these individuals may suffer from some form of mental illness, but a lack of consistent definitions for mental illness and incomplete information about the number of these individuals makes it difficult to create accurate estimates.

A recent survey indicates that many jails are not equipped to address the needs of individuals with mental health needs held in those jails. A 2016 survey conducted by the Public Citizen's Research Group found that half of the jails who responded had staff who received very little training in how to deal with mentally ill individuals, and that less than half had staff who could offer any treatment for people with severe mental illnesses in local jails. Further, small jails reported greater difficulty than larger jails in providing mental health services.

Legislators have expressed concerns that although many county jail inmates may have mental health needs, jails may struggle to provide appropriate mental health services.

AUDIT OBJECTIVES AND TENTATIVE METHODOLOGY

The audit objectives listed below represent the questions that we would answer through our audit work. The proposed steps for each objective are intended to convey the type of work we would do, but are subject to change as we learn more about the audit issues and are able to refine our methodology.

Objective 1: What types of mental health services are available for people who are held in local Kansas jails? Our tentative methodology would include the following:

- Review documents and work with officials from the Kansas Department of Corrections and local jails to understand what types of mental health services and training local jails are required to provide.
- For a sample of local jails, review documents and interview jail officials to identify what mental health services and training they currently provide.

- For a sample of counties, review documents and interview community mental health officials to determine what mental health services are provided in the community and determine if those services are accessible by people held in local jails.
- Interview both local jail and community mental health officials to identify any challenges they face in providing mental health services in jails and to determine whether they have any opinions on what can be done to improve services in this area.

Objective 2: What would it cost to provide appropriate mental health services to individuals who are held in a sample of Kansas jails? Our tentative methodology would include the following:

- Review professional literature and interview various stakeholders to identify best practices for staff training and providing mental health services to those held in local jails.
- For the sample of jails selected in Objective 1 compare the training and services currently provided to those services best practices indicate should be provided to identify any differences.
- Review the services currently provided and work with officials from the jails and the mental health community to determine how many individuals in the sample of jails might not receive appropriate mental health services, and the costs associated with holding those individuals in jail while they await appropriate mental health services in the community.
- Work with officials from jails and the mental health community to estimate the cost to provide appropriate mental health services in jail, and how it compares to the cost to hold individuals in jail while seeking similar services the community.

ESTIMATED RESOURCES

We estimate this audit would require a team of **three (3) auditors** for a total of **five (5) months** (from the time the audit starts to our best estimated of when it would be ready for the committee).