County Technical Assistance Service
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Sufficient Jails

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We hope this information will be useful to you; reference to it will assist you with many of the questions that will arise in your tenure with county government. However, the *Tennessee Code Annotated* and other relevant laws or regulations should always be consulted before any action is taken based upon the contents of this document.

Please feel free to contact us if you have questions or comments regarding this information or any other CTAS website material.

Sincerely,

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Sufficient Jails

Reference Number: CTAS-1386

The sheriff has authority, when the jail of the county is insufficient for the safekeeping of a prisoner, to convey the prisoner to the nearest sufficient jail in the state. T.C.A. § 41-4-121(a). This authority is subject to the securing of a court order. *State v. Grey*, 602 S.W.2d 259 (Tenn. Crim. App. 1980). In all cases, also, where it is shown to the committing magistrate, judge or court that the jail of the county in which the commitment should be made is insufficient for the safekeeping of the prisoner, the commitment shall be by mittimus or warrant stating the fact to the nearest sufficient county jail. T.C.A. § 41-4-121(b). In all cases where the jail in which a prisoner is confined becomes insufficient from any cause, any circuit or criminal judge, upon application of the sheriff and proof of the fact, may order the prisoner, by mittimus or warrant, to be removed to the nearest sufficient jail. T.C.A. § 41-4-121(c).

In *Chisom v. State*, 539 S.W.2d 831, 833 (Tenn. Crim. App. 1976), the Court of Criminal Appeals held that the trial judge acted within his authority in ordering the removal of a convicted rapist, for safekeeping reasons, from the county jail to the state penitentiary pending his appeal. However, in *State v. Grey*, 602 S.W.2d 259 (Tenn. Crim. App. 1980), the court held that the statute providing authority for a criminal judge to order a prisoner to be removed to the nearest sufficient jail, upon proof that jail in which prisoner was confined was insufficient, did not justify an order transferring the defendant, who was being detained in a local jail prior to trial, to the state penitentiary for safekeeping upon finding that defendant was an escape risk. The court found that the term "jail" was not intended to include the state penitentiary, and there was no showing that there was no nearby jail sufficient to contain defendant safely.

Guard for Removal of Prisoner

Reference Number: CTAS-1387

The sheriff is authorized to employ as many as two guards, if necessary, in removing a prisoner under T.C.A. § 41-4-121, and they shall each be allowed for such services as are provided for similar services in conveying convicts to the penitentiary. T.C.A. § 41-4-122. On demand made immediately preceding or during the term at which the prisoner is triable, the prisoner must be delivered to the sheriff or deputy sheriff of the county from which the prisoner was sent. T.C.A. § 41-4-123. When the court orders the prisoner to be carried to the jail of another county for safekeeping for want of a sufficient jail in the county where the case is pending, it may make a reasonable allowance to the sheriff and necessary guard, including expenses for conveying the prisoner to the jail so ordered by the judge. T.C.A. § 41-4-124. If the court directs the sheriff to summon more than two guards in order to carry safely any prisoner charged with a crime from one county to another for trial or safekeeping, the commissioner of finance and administration shall allow such additional guards ordered by the court the same compensation that is allowed by law to the two guards, and give a warrant for the same to the sheriff. T.C.A. § 41-4-126. *See also* T.C.A. § 8-26-108.

The jailer in such case may prove costs in the circuit or criminal court of the county and obtain the certificate of the district attorney general of that court thereto. The clerk of the court shall forward the same to the court where the cause is pending to be taxed in the bill of costs. T.C.A. § 41-4-125.

Jail Crowding

Reference Number: CTAS-1388

The Tennessee Supreme Court has held that an "insufficient" jail under T.C.A. § 41-4-121 includes one that is so overcrowded that it violates the prisoner's rights under the Eighth Amendment to the United States Constitution. *State v. Walker*, 905 S.W.2d 554, 557 (Tenn. 1995).

> If a sheriff is of the opinion that he is being asked to house too many inmates at his facility, he can request the committing judge or any circuit or criminal judge to order prisoners removed to the nearest sufficient jail. Under T.C.A. § 41-4-121(c), the court may order such a transfer "[i]n all cases where the jail in which the prisoner is confined becomes insufficient from any cause ..." The population level is relevant to the determination of sufficiency, but is not conclusive as to this issue.
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> With regard to the sheriff's legal obligations under the Eighth Amendment, it is important to bear in mind that insufficiency under the statute is not the same thing as unconstitutionality. The jail is not necessarily unconstitutionally overcrowded simply because it houses more inmates than its Tennessee Corrections Institute (TCI) capacity. *Feliciano v. Barcelo*, 497 F.Supp. 14, 35 (D.P.R.1979). TCI and American Correctional Association (ACA) standards do not establish the

> constitutional standard. *Grubbs v. Bradley*, 552 F.Supp. 1052, 1124 (M.D. Tenn. 1982). Overcrowding is not a per se constitutional violation. *Rhodes v. Chapman*, 452 U.S. 337, 101 S.Ct. 2392, 69 L.Ed.2d 59 (1981).

Op. Tenn. Atty. Gen. 89-65 (April 28, 1989). *See also* Op. Tenn. Atty. Gen. 02-015 (February 6, 2002) (This office has maintained "that insufficiency under the statute is not the same thing as unconstitutionality. The jail is not necessarily unconstitutionally overcrowded simply because it houses more inmates than its Tennessee Corrections Institute (TCI) capacity.").

"It is ... beyond dispute that county officials have a duty to maintain their jails to minimize the risks resulting from overcrowding, *i.e.*, conflicts among and injury to those individuals incarcerated in the jail, lest they violate the prisoners' constitutional rights (and subject themselves to liability under 42 U.S.C. § 1983.)." *Patrick v. Jasper County*, 901 F.2d 561, 569, n. 16 (7th Cir. 1990), *citing Carver v. Knox County*, 887 F.2d 1287 (6th Cir. 1989); *Union County Jail Inmates v. DiBuono,* 713 F.2d 984 (3d Cir. 1983), *cert. denied*, 465 U.S. 1102, 104 S.Ct. 1600, 80 L.Ed.2d 130 (1984).

However, overcrowding is not a *per se* constitutional violation. *Rhodes v. Chapman*, 452 U.S. 337, 101 S.Ct. 2392, 69 L.Ed.2d 59 (1981). A claim alleging that the "overall conditions" of confinement are inadequate cannot give rise to an Eighth Amendment violation when no specific deprivation of a single human need exists. *Wilson v. Seiter*, 501 U.S. 294, 305, 111 S.Ct. 2321, 2327, 115 L.Ed.2d 271 (1991) ("Nothing so amorphous as 'overall conditions' can rise to the level of cruel and unusual punishment when no specific deprivation of a single human need exists.").

In *Bell v. Wolfish*, 441 U.S. 520, 99 S.Ct. 1861, 60 L.Ed.2d 447 (1979), the Supreme Court held that "double-bunking" pretrial detainees in cells that have a total floor space of approximately 75 square feet did not violate the pretrial detainees' due process rights. "[W]e are convinced as a matter of law that 'double-bunking' as practiced at the MCC did not amount to punishment and did not, therefore, violate respondents' rights under the Due Process Clause of the Fifth Amendment." *Id*. at 541, 99 S.Ct. at 1875. In *Bell*, the Court noted that the respondents' "reliance on other lower court decisions concerning minimum space requirements for different institutions and on correctional standards issued by various groups was misplaced." *Id*. at 543, n. 27, 99 S.Ct. at 1876, n. 27. The Court stated that "while the recommendations of these various groups may be instructive in certain cases, they simply do not establish the constitutional minima; rather, they establish goals recommended by the organization in question." *Id*.

In *Rhodes v. Chapman*, 452 U.S. 337, 101 S.Ct. 2392, 69 L.Ed.2d 59 (1981), the United States Supreme Court considered whether double-bunking inmates in 63 square foot cells was cruel and unusual punishment in violation of the Eighth Amendment. The Supreme Court found no Eighth Amendment violation.

The court found that the double-celling made necessary by an unanticipated increase in the prison population (38 percent over design capacity) did not lead to deprivations of essential food, medical care, or sanitation. The court found no evidence that double-celling under the circumstances of the case either inflicted unnecessary or wanton pain or was grossly disproportionate to the severity of crimes warranting imprisonment. The court noted that the Constitution does not mandate comfortable prisons. *Id*. at 348, 101 S.Ct. at 2400.

In finding a constitutional violation, the lower court had relied on, among other considerations, square footage standards promulgated by the American Correctional Association (60-80 square feet); the National Sheriffs' Association (70-80 square feet); and the National Council on Crime and Delinquency (50 square feet). The Supreme Court stated that the lower court had "erred in assuming that opinions of experts as to desirable prison conditions suffice to establish contemporary standards of decency." As the court noted in *Bell v. Wolfish*, such opinions may be helpful and relevant with respect to some questions, but "they simply do not establish the constitutional minima; rather, they establish goals recommended by the organization in question." *Id*. at 350, n. 13, 101 S.Ct. at 2401, n. 13, *citing Bell v. Wolfish*, 441 U.S. 520, 543-544, n. 27, 99 S.Ct. 1861, 1876, n. 27, 60 L.Ed.2d 447 (1979).

In *Stevenson v. Whetsel*, 52 Fed.Appx. 444 (10th Cir. 2002), the Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals held that the county's placement of three pretrial detainees in a jail cell designed for two did not violate the detainee's due process rights. The court held that the detainee could not recover damages for injuries allegedly sustained due to prison overcrowding absent a showing that the overcrowding resulted in the denial of the minimal civilized measure of life's necessities, or that prison officials were aware that overcrowding created excessive risks to inmate safety.

> [O]vercrowding alone is not "sufficiently serious" to establish a constitutional violation. Stevenson has not demonstrated that placing three inmates in a cell designed for two denied him the minimal civilized measure of life's necessities. He has not alleged that the situation led to "deprivations of essential food, medical care, or sanitation." Nor has he alleged facts allowing an inference that

conditions rose to the level of "conditions posing a substantial risk of serious harm."

Id. at 446. *See also Kennibrew v. Russell*, 578 F.Supp. 164, 168 (E.D. Tenn. 1983) (The United States Supreme Court has held that double-celling of prison inmates in cells containing 63 square feet of floor space (31.5 square feet per inmate) does not constitute cruel and unusual punishment.).

"The constitutional standard on overcrowding cannot be expressed in a square footage formula. Rather, whether a particular institution is unconstitutionally overcrowded depends on a number of factors including the size of the inmate's living space, the length of time the inmate spends in his cell each day, the length of time of his incarceration, his opportunity for exercise and his general sanitary and living conditions." *Carver v. Knox County*, 753 F.Supp. 1398, 1401 (E.D. Tenn. 1990) (citations omitted). The correct legal standard recognizes that the issue is not overcrowding *per se*, rather, it is *unconstitutional* overcrowding. In other words, a prison facility is not unconstitutional simply because it is overcrowded. In order to ascertain whether a particular facility is unconstitutionally overcrowded, the court must review "...a number of factors including the size of the inmates' living space, the length of time the inmate spends in his cell each day, the length of time of his incarceration, his opportunity for exercise and his general sanitary and living conditions...". *Id*. However, even though the court is required to consider all of the prison's conditions and circumstances in evaluating the sentenced inmates' Eighth Amendment claims, the court must find a specific condition on which to base an Eighth Amendment claim, *i.e.*, it must amount to a deprivation of "life's necessities." *Id*. at 1400 (citations omitted).

See Roberts v. Tennessee Dept. of Correction, 887 F.2d 1281 (6th Cir. 1989) and *Carver v. Knox County*, 887 F.2d 1287 (6th Cir. 1989), for cases dealing with the court ordered removal of state inmates from county jails.
