Office of the District of Columbia Auditor

For immediate release
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Urgent Need for New D.C. Jail

Deaths in custody in the Jail are significantly higher than the national average; $30 million spent on overtime because of staffing shortages

WASHINGTON, May 28, 2025—A new report by the D.C. Auditor—with 39 findings and 61 recommendations related to the continued deterioration of the D.C. Jail's infrastructure and ongoing dangers to residents and staff, including higher than average deaths in custody numbers—makes an urgent call for the need for new facilities.

In its 2019 report, Poor Conditions Persist at Aging D.C. Jail; New Facility Needed to Mitigate Risks, ODCA found that conditions in the 40-year-old facility were quickly deteriorating and had become hazardous to the health and safety of inmates and staff who live and work there. Now, six years later, ODCA contracted with the Council for Court Excellence (CCE) to do a comprehensive review of corrections conditions.

In addition to environmental shortcomings, the new report's most egregious finding is that the rate of deaths in custody in the Jail during the audit period had climbed to 3.5 times the national average, and the rate of overdose-related deaths was 10 times higher.

"A new jail to replace the aging Correctional Detention Facility has been discussed for more than 20 years and it's past time to act," D.C. Auditor Kathy Patterson said. "The administration's plan for a new auxiliary building is laudable but does not meet the immediate need." Acknowledging the difficult challenge of budgeting for operations and capital, Patterson added, "Elected officials need to make hard choices and set priorities, and life and death issues must be at the top of the list."

The Department of Corrections took exception to many of the findings and recommendations and their lengthy comments are included in the ODCA report. The letter from DOC Director Thomas Faust acknowledged that "there is no question that the structure of the CDF facility presents real limitations in delivering programming and services."

The subject of funding for a new District of Columbia correctional facility was a topic of debate in the deliberations a year ago on the Fiscal Year 2025 Budget and Financial Plan. Because it was clear that the funding level would be an ongoing point of contention and to support the work of the D.C. Council, ODCA contracted with CCE to produce a comprehensive survey of current conditions at the Central Detention Facility and the Correctional Treatment Facility. (See attachment for the 15-year history of the on-again, off-again plan to replace the facility.)

Two critical tasks emerged from the detailed review: the need for ongoing executive and legislative oversight on staffing, supervision, training, and all the other factors that may contribute to the high number of deaths and other incidents of violence at the facilities and, second, the importance of replacing the Central Detention Facility at a much faster pace than now envisioned by the Bowser Administration.

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The review found that the state of conditions within DOC facilities not only has not improved since the publication of ODCA's 2019 audit, but, in fact, has worsened. In addition, the report's findings summarized below provide a broad look at dysfunction in DOC operations and management, including general understaffing, inconsistent compliance, and sometimes risky non-compliance with agency protocols and correctional best practices, all pointing to the need for increased oversight and significant culture changes within the Department of Corrections.

Death in custody rates. In addition to the high rates of deaths, the report also found that DOC provides minimal and inconsistent data to the public, oversight bodies, and family members regarding the circumstances of deaths in custody. DOC also did not appear to engage in regular agency-wide analyses of the factors contributing to deaths in custody to identify changes to staffing, training, or policies needed to reduce them and provide accountability.

Contraband, violence, and staffing issues. Two former DOC staff members were guilty of, and two others were charged with bringing contraband into the jail. Poor maintenance, deteriorating conditions, and contraband contributed to instances of violence in the jail during the audit period. There were at least 790–an average of more than two per day–reported assaults on staff and residents during the review. DOC has many position vacancies, impacting capacity and response time, and relies heavily on staff overtime. Staff and residents at DOC have reported that harassment, misconduct, and disrespect negatively impact staff morale and resident well-being.

Deteriorating infrastructure. DOC failed to maintain consistently clean, hygienic, and safe conditions and did not adequately control parasites, vermin, and mold, and failed to maintain consistent healthy temperatures in both jail facilities. DOC facilities were found to constantly need repairs to multiple systems in both common areas and residents' cells, including broken and malfunctioning cell doors, locks, keys, gates, plumbing, and wiring.

Mental health and substance use issues. Approximately 70% of all DOC residents had an identified "mental health issue" at intake at the start of the review period, and the majority of those individuals resided in general population units where not all specialized services are available. In addition, some 37% of mental health support positions in the jail were vacant at the end of the audit period. Even with growing substance use treatment offerings at the jail, DOC did not address all substance use issues among residents who needed care, with insufficient residential treatment beds, vacant peer navigator positions, and the need to administer Narcan at least 148 times during the review.

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The mission of the Office of the District of Columbia Auditor (ODCA) is to support the Council of the District of Columbia by making sound recommendations that improve the effectiveness, efficiency, and accountability of the District government. Learn more at www.dcauditor.org.

Timeline for New Correctional Facility

Date	Event	Source: ODCA Analysis
2010	December 21, 2010, memorandum Department of Corrections (DOC) requested $420 million in capital funding allotments for the six-year period of 2012 through 2017 for a project entitled, "New facility - per DC General and Mass Ave Proposed Master Plan."	
2015	Public Safety Master Plan (completed in 2015) recommended the city build a criminal justice center at Blue Plains or Hill East.	
2016	FY 2017 Budget and Financial Plan - Project CRB01-New Correctional Facility for (CDT) and (CDF) for Department of Corrections (DOC) (FL0) opened with $5M of funding in Fiscal Year 2022.	
2017	FY 2018 Budget and Financial Plan - Project CRB01-New Correctional Facility is not included in the budget.	
2017	Office of Public-Private Partnerships' (OP3) reports new corrections center under consideration with the Department of Corrections and the Department of General Services as the agencies involved.	
2018	FY 2019 Budget and Financial Plan - Project CRB01-New Correctional Facility is not included in the budget.	
2018	Deputy Mayor for Public Safety and Justice Kevin Donahue said the planning for a new jail was placed on "pause" and that $100,000 had been budgeted to conduct a study within fiscal year 2019 to look at the need for a new facility. (August 2018)	
2018	Office of Victim Services and Justice Grants (OVSJG) issued a Request for Applications, for a grant of up to $150,000 to engage an organization to build stakeholder engagement and solicit feedback related to the design and construction of a new correctional facility in the District of Columbia. (October 2018)	
2019	District Task Force on Jails & Justice was founded as an independent advisory body. (April 2019)	
2019	OVSJG awards grant to the Council for Court Excellence for "DC Correctional Facility Stakeholder Engagement".	
2019	FY 2020 Budget and Financial Plan - Project CRB01-New Correctional Facility is included with $5M in funding in FY 2025.	
2019	Funding for a FY 2020 Grant (Justice Grants)…"to build stakeholder engagement and solicit feedback related to the design and construction of a new correctional facility."	
2019	Release of Phase I Findings and Recommendations of the District Task Force on Jails & Justice, "Jails & Justice: A Framework for Change" (October 2019). Includes Phase I Recommendation 12. Upon completing a plan for community investment, decarceration, and local control, the District should renovate or build facilities to support its new goals for prevention, intervention, secure detention, and reentry.	
2020	Additional funding for FY 2021 through the Office of Victim Services and Justice Grants to complete the work of the Jails & Justice Task Force.	
2020	FY 2021 Budget and Financial Plan - Project CRBNJ-New Correctional Facility is included with $5M in funding in FY 2025.	
2021	Release of Phase II Findings and Implementation Plan, "Jails & Justice: Our Transformation Starts Today" (February 2021). Includes a ten-year timeline for the creation of a new correctional facility that consists of three stages.	
2021	FY 2022 Budget and Financial Plan - No project for a New Correctional facility is included in the FY 2022 budget.	
2022	FY 2023 Budget and Financial Plan - Project CRB01-New Correctional Facility is included with $4M in funding for FY2023 and a total $250.5M of funding over the six-year capital plan.	
2023	Notice to Proceed & Letter Contract for Contract No. DCAM-23-CS-RFP-0007 with CGL Companies, LLC to develop and provide an architectural program to guide the design and construction of the new Correctional facility annex was executed on 5/9/2023 by the Department of General Services.	
2023	Mayor Bowser announces selection of CGL Companies, LLC as the Architectural Program Consultant for Correctional Treatment Facility Annex at the DC Jail (May 2023).	
2023	Mayor Bowser transmits Contract No. DCAM-23-CS-RFP-0007 with CGL Companies, LLC for $5,891,182.96 to the Council for approval (June 2023).	
2023	Contract No. DCAM-23-CS-RFP-0007 for $5,891,182.96 with CGL Companies, LLC is deemed approved by the Council (June 2023).	
2023	FY 2024 Budget and Financial Plan - Project CRB01-New Correctional Facility is included with $10M in funding for FY 2024 and a grand total of $276.5M of funding over the six-year capital plan.	
2024	FY 2025 Budget and Financial Plan - Project No. 100044, AMO-100044-AM0.CRB01C. New Correctional Facility for (CDF) is included with $24M in funding for FY 2025 and a total of $463M of funding over the six-year capital plan.	
2024	Mayor Bowser transmits modification two to exercise option period one of Contract. No. DCAM-23-CS-RFP-0007 with CGL Companies, LLC for $3,381,523.30 to the Council for approval (April 2024).	
2024	Option period one of Contract No. DCAM-23-CS-RFP-0007 for $3,381,523.30 with CGL Companies, LLC is deemed approved by the Council (May 2024).	