

SENECA COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

FREDRICK W. STEVENS
Sheriff



CHARLES W. BOYER
Chief Deputy

Testimony to the Ohio Senate Government Oversight Committee
Seneca County Sheriff Fredrick Stevens
HB 96
May 7, 2025

Chair Manchester, Vice Chair Brenner, Ranking Member Weinstein, and members of the Senate Government Oversight Committee:

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. I am Seneca County Sheriff Fredrick Stevens, and I am grateful for the opportunity to talk to you about the financial needs that my office faces.

I am here to ask you to please support a House provision of the budget that requires the Ohio Department of Medicaid to submit for an 1115 Medicaid Waiver that would allow federal Medicaid dollars to be used to cover eligible health care costs for individuals incarcerated in our county jail— particularly those who are pre-trial and have not yet been convicted.

Many of the inmates in our jail struggle with identified mental health and/or substance abuse disorders that qualify for Medicaid coverage. But current law does not allow those disorders to be covered by Medicaid if the person is incarcerated. In order for the person to receive the treatment they need, the jail must fund the treatment. This places an immense and unjust strain on our budget.

Inmate medical treatment costs continually increase. In 2020, my office budgeted \$40,000 for inmate medical expenses. By the end of the year, we spent over \$76,000, nearly double our annual estimate and allotment. The next year, in 2021, my office doubled the inmate medical expense budget to \$80,000, and our estimate was still not sufficient. That year, we spent over \$91,000 on medical expenses. In 2024, we budgeted \$75,000 and spent over \$83,000.

A jail's medical expenses are compounded by hidden costs, such as \$75,000 annually we pay for weekly physician visits for nonemergency medical needs, as well as the hidden cost of funding the services of a medical billing company to manage our medical bills. The company reviews our medical bills, recodes the services, and resubmits them to the hospital or other medical facility. For example, we received bills totaling \$389,697.06 for just one repeat offender inmate whose treatments would be covered by Medicaid if he was not incarcerated. The medical billing company managed to decrease the costs to \$19,967.54. Now that is a tremendous savings, but it is still an astronomical amount of money absorbed into our budget, and it does not include the fee we paid to the medical billing service.

Each year, we must ask the Seneca County Commissioners for additional funding to cover ever-increasing medical costs. If those treatments were funded by federal Medicaid dollars, the savings within our budget could provide for better overall care for our inmates, improving quality of life for them and freeing local dollars for a wider scope of use.

I would also like to ask you to please support continued and increased funding for jail renovation, and I would like to present a unique solution to the struggles that county sheriffs face as we manage aging jail facilities. Although I am grateful for the millions of dollars that Gov. DeWine's office has invested in jail construction and renovation, the current method of funding distribution creates few winners and many losers across the state. I would like to suggest a new method that would help all Ohio sheriffs better maintain their jails and, in some counties, prevent the need for new construction.

First, I would like to give a quick overview of the building situation at the Seneca County Jail.



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When I began my first term in 2021, the Seneca County Jail was 27 years old, and its aging equipment included boilers, air handlers, kitchen appliances, intercoms, plumbing, electrical, and door locks, to name just a few big-ticket items that needed to be addressed immediately. The jail's condition presented health and safety concerns for staff and inmates. That year, the governor's office funded \$50 million in jail maintenance costs, but Seneca County was not among the handful of grant recipients. My office reapplied for grants in 2022, 2023, and 2024 and received no funding. Like many sheriffs across the state, I spent countless hours compiling data and information for the grant application, with no return for the time and money invested.

After four years of not receiving any funding at all to help with keeping our aging facility going, I came up with a simple way to make all 88 counties winners of the grant. Instead of dispersing the money as a competitive grant, I would like to suggest that the State simply disperse it equally among all the counties that have sheriff-run jails. Although this would not address new construction, it would allow for the bulk of the aging facilities to receive yearly funds that can be earmarked specifically for remodeling and renovation projects. There are far more aging facilities with renovation/remodel needs than new construction needs.

My idea of an equal disbursement of funds will save taxpayer money. First, on the State's end, the current method requires state employees to spend time receiving, reviewing, and scoring grant applications. The entire process is costly and could be eliminated by an equal disbursement method. Secondly, renovation funds could address urgent jail maintenance needs, avoiding further, costlier problems down the road. And, as buildings are properly maintained, it could possibly prevent the need for new construction in some counties.

This is a practical solution to an ongoing problem at county jails. My office spent over \$2 million on repairs and equipment replacement since I took office. If the state jail renovation funds had been distributed equally over those same years, those funds could have covered my costs. Instead, the renovations – which were necessary for health and safety concerns – pulled funding from other county departments.

The Seneca County Jail is a 24/7/365 agency and the biggest drain on county expenses, and we would be grateful to receive some of the taxpayer money back from Columbus through a grant distribution process that would benefit all counties across Ohio.

Thank you for allowing me to talk about the needs we face at the Seneca County Jail.

Sincerely,
Seneca County Sheriff Fredrick Stevens



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