



SHERIFF EARNELL R. LUCAS

Communication to the Board of Supervisors

DATE: August 24, 2022

TO: Marcelia Nicholson, Chairwoman, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisor

FROM: Denita R. Ball, Chief Deputy, Milwaukee County Sheriff's Office

RE: **Non-Contact In-Person Visitation Restoration Informational Report**

In Resolution 22-432, the Board of Supervisors requested that the House of Correction and Office of the Sheriff study restoring visitation at the House of Correction (HOC) and Milwaukee County Jail/Criminal Justice Facility (CJF) and to report back no later than the September 2022 meeting cycle.

Information requested

- Operational and fiscal estimates and potential grant sources relating to the requirements of resumption of in-person visitation at the House of Correction and Jail/CJF
- The potential operational benefits of in-person visitation
- What neighboring jurisdictions, peer institutions across the United States, and neighboring metropolitan areas are doing relating to visitation and video calling generally and in response to COVID-19

Background

Prior to 2002, the Milwaukee County Jail Facility was equipped for and provided non-contact in-person visits for residents housed at the Jail. Visitation areas are located in the center of the building, providing between 2 and 5 visiting booths for each pod. Prior to video visitation, these pods utilized intercom or telephone audio to allow visitors to communicate with loved ones through security glass. In 2002, following an escape in the area, a study of security at the MCJ recommended video calling as a method of enhancing security. As video and teleconferencing technologies continued to advance,

the MCSO turned its focus to video visitation in an effort to increase visitation access for those families who were not able to physically visit at the jail facility. Video visitation was first implemented in the Jail in 2004 through capital project WC021. At this point, in-person visitation ended at the Jail facility and the public-facing areas of the MCJ were closed. A video-visitation area was established on the ground floor of the MCJ which allowed those families without reliable access to internet or technology services to visit their loved ones using visitation stations supplied by the County and its vendor partners. Under this system and prior to COVID-19, the public could go to the MCJ to video call a resident, or remotely video call from anywhere in the world for a fee.

Milwaukee County Sheriff's Office Status Update

- Non-contact in-person visitation has not been operational at the Milwaukee County Jail since 2002 and would need restoration of the visitation areas to meet current construction, safety, and security standards.
- No funding was allotted for this study so, on July 15, 2022, RFI-2022-002 Milwaukee County Jail In-Person Visitation Feasibility Analysis was posted and closed on August 12, 2022.
- As the areas for non-contact in-person visitation at the Milwaukee County Jail have not been utilized for approximately 20 years, all areas to facilitate public visitation would require upgrades and restoration. Work needed includes, but is not limited to: painting, flooring, drop ceiling replacement, communication upgrades, security enhancements, and structural upgrades.

Operational and Fiscal Estimates

Milwaukee County received two responses to RFI-2022-002 for non-contact in-person visitation. Although we were hoping for more, the responses did provide some insight into the costs associated with the upgrades needed.

- TLC Engineering Solutions Inc. provided a response to our RFI. In their response they estimated a cost of \$15,000 to \$25,000 for electrical engineering and technology consulting to assist in conducting a feasibility analysis related to non-contact in-person visitation at the jail. They further estimated the total cost for the implementation of in-person visitation to be \$3 million - \$7 million.
- Venture Architects provided a response and suggested we budget \$140,000 to complete a feasibility analysis related to in-person visitation. They however did not provide an estimate on the potential total cost related to restoration of in-person visitation.

Additional Expenses

- Body scanner – As security would be a high concern, a body scanner would be needed to ensure contraband would not enter the facility. All family members coming in to visit an occupant would need to go through a body scanner, similar to body scanners at the airport. The estimated cost for a new body scanner is

\$250,000.

- Cameras – In order to monitor and ensure safety in all visitation areas, our camera system would need to be enhanced in all applicable areas. We currently estimate that at least 36 new cameras would need to be installed. With the addition of new cameras, more storage space and server space would be required. The estimated total cost to complete this is currently \$117,469.
- FTE's – To facilitate non-contact in-person visitation, more staffing would be required. We would staff the non-contact in-person visitation area with one Clerical Specialist for scheduling purposes, and one Deputy for security screening. Two additional Deputies would be required for monitoring and incident response. The estimated cost for these new staff members is estimated to be \$235,253 annually.
- Lobby – The jail lobby is currently not set up for non-contact in-person visitation. The entire lobby would need to be remodeled to provide appropriate security check points and a waiting area for family members with visits scheduled.
- The MCSO is not presently aware of any grant sources that would fund this project.

Operational Benefits

- Studies have shown that parents who receive more visits from their children have lower recidivism rates, however young children do not always have access to non-contact in-person visitation.
- Occupants can visit children easier on video visitation utilizing video conferencing stations as it eliminates the strain associated with young children going through security measures at detention facilities.
- It has been recommended by one of the RFI respondents that video visitation be maintained even if we implement non-contact in-person visitation to provide options for family members.
- Our video visitation monitors have been set up in the booths that would be used for in-person visitation, however, they have been set up in a manner that would not obstruct the view for non-contact in-person visitation. The booths are currently set up on the occupant side to be functional for both purposes, however video visitation would not be an option during non-contact in-person visitation hours.
- Video visitation is the securest and safest option for visitation. It provides an easier option to record and review conversations. Also, there is almost zero opportunity to share contraband.

What other jurisdictions are doing

- Although we have no solid statistics on what other jurisdictions are doing related to visitation, it is clear that with newer technology there has been a general trend toward video visitation for reasons of safety, security, and ease of use for family members. With non-contact in-person visitation there are generally long wait lines, security screenings, the inconvenience of wasted trips due to canceled visits when issues arise in the jail. This, coupled with the fact that finding parking

in the downtown area is expensive and inconvenient, makes maintaining a multi-faceted approach to visitation the best option.

Concerns

- Security – Instituting non-contact in-person visiting would create an environment where many security measures would need to be enacted to ensure a safe environment. We would want to ensure that the risk of escape was mitigated by enhancing security procedures and infrastructure.
- Budget – It is now believed that the upgrades needed to facilitate non-contact in-person visitation would cost \$3 million on the low end. This money could be used by the county for other projects or programs with more urgent needs.
- The in-person visits will be non-contact, with glass between the occupant and visitor, which essentially does not provide any physical contact and may not be desired over video visitation by either the occupants or their family members.

The Milwaukee County Sheriff's Office would be able to move forward with this project if it were to be fully funded. We do see benefits in conducting non-contact in-person visitation in conjunction with video visitation. A fully funded feasibility analysis would be required to determine a total cost for the project as it is already known that many upgrades and renovations are needed.