

# THE TEXAS JAIL ASSOCIATION KEY ISSUES

Vol XXX, No. 1

Winter 2026



Winter 2026 Edition



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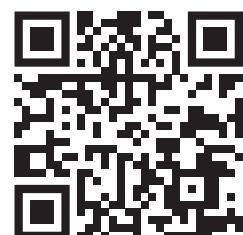


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## 2026 Jail Management Issues

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# Message from the President



Hello TJA family,

The Jail Management Issues Conference in Galveston was a tremendous success. We had record attendance and a completely sold-out exhibition hall. It was an outstanding week of training, networking, and connecting with one another. I want to thank everyone who took the time to present at the conference, as well as all of our vendors for their continued support. Your dedication truly helps make these events what they are.

Our Jail Talk podcasts continue to thrive and have become a valuable space for corrections professionals, leaders, and advocates to share their stories, strategies, and insights from behind

the walls of our jails. I want to thank board member Aimee Crockett for hosting the podcasts and everyone who has participated and shared their experiences. Your willingness to open up and contribute helps strengthen our profession. The podcast episodes are available on Spotify and YouTube for anyone who has not tuned in yet.

This is an exciting time of year, as we prepare for elections and our Annual Conference. If being more involved with TJA interests you, I encourage you to consider serving on a committee. It is a meaningful way to help advance our commitment to professionalism through training and to support the needs of our membership. I also encourage you to speak with current board members to learn about their experiences and how serving has helped them grow professionally. It is truly a rewarding opportunity.

Award nominations have closed for Detention Officer of the Year, the Hall of Fame, the TJA Lifesaving Award, and the Jerry Baggs Leadership Award. We look forward to recognizing individuals from around the state that are excelling and making a real difference.

The 40th Annual Conference is right around the corner, and registration is now open. The conference will take place May 4 through May 8, 2026, at the Embassy Suites in San Marcos, Texas. We have a full agenda with excellent training sessions, and I hope to see all of you there.

No matter the size of our facilities, we share one common truth, and that is that our jailers are the foundation and heart of corrections and a vital piece of the criminal justice system. Their work is often overlooked, but their dedication can never be overstated.

Stay safe, and God bless.

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**Cover Photo Credit: Snow and Ice in Field, Austin, 2023. Photo taken by Sherri Morrill @samsartdays. www.Unsplash.com**



# Call for Articles!



Key Issues invites all members to send articles, photographs, presentations, papers, announcements, challenges, creative solutions or any submission that may be of interest to the TJA membership.

### SUBMISSION DEADLINES

Summer Issue  
June 1, 2026

Fall Issue  
October 1, 2026

Winter Issue  
December 1, 2026

**SEND SUBMISSIONS OR INQUIRIES TO**  
Sharese Hurst / sharese@shsu.edu



# In Memoriam



## **Rodney Lynn Cooper (1960 – 2025)**

The Texas Jail Association mourns the passing of Rodney Lynn Cooper, a cherished friend, colleague, and long-time volunteer who passed away on October 21, 2025. Rodney's service to the corrections profession and to the Texas Jail Association extended over four decades, marked by unwavering commitment, integrity, and kindness.

A proud graduate of Sam Houston State University, Rodney dedicated his career to correctional leadership and professional development across Texas. He most recently served as Executive Director for LaSalle's Private Jail Division, where he earned respect statewide for his steady leadership and deep understanding of jail operations. Within TJA, Rodney served on the Board as the Private Jail Representative, where his insight, work ethic, and friendship made him an invaluable member of our team.

For more than ten years, Rodney gave his time, energy, and heart to the Association. He volunteered at conferences, guided planning efforts, mentored new members, and always made himself available whenever someone needed a hand—or an encouraging word. As one TJA Board member fondly recalled, "He was always the first to show up and the last to leave whenever anyone needed help."

Those who knew him best described him as a man who "always showed what right looks like." His colleagues and friends remember his integrity, his humor, and his habit of checking in just to listen. One board member shared, "You lent an ear when I needed someone to talk to. In such a short time, we went from strangers to great friends. Words cannot express the sadness I feel, but please know that you made a lasting impact on my life."

Rodney's legacy will live on through the countless people he influenced—those he mentored, those he led, and those who had the privilege of calling him a friend. His example of professionalism, compassion, and quiet strength embodies the very best of what TJA represents.

Rodney is survived by his wife Gayle, his daughters Amanda and Kalyn, and his grandchildren. The Texas Jail Association extends its deepest condolences to Rodney's family, friends, and colleagues. He will always remain part of our TJA family and will be profoundly missed.

— Marcy Calnan, Editor, Key Issues, Texas Jail Association



# In Memoriam



## **Darcey Elaine Lynch (1958 – 2025)**

Please join us in supporting the Upton County Sheriff's Office during this difficult time as they mourn the passing of their beloved Jail Administrator, Darcey Lynch. Darcey passed away on December 14, 2025 from her battle with cancer.

In 2013, she began her career as a dispatcher and jailer, answering a calling to serve others. In 2016, she was promoted to Jail Administrator, a role she fulfilled with commitment, dedication, and compassion.

Darcey's Memorial Service was December 20, 2025.

Her obituary can be found here: <https://www.nicholsfunerals.com/obituaries/darcey-lynch>



## **Holly Clarissa Johnston (1983 – 2025)**

Holly Clarissa Johnston, 42, of Scotland, Texas, passed away peacefully on January 5, 2026, in Wichita Falls. She grew up in Archer City and graduated from Windthorst High School. Holly worked for Berend Brothers before dedicating her career to law enforcement as a jailer for several sheriff's departments and most recently served as Jail Administrator and Captain for Clay County. She enjoyed George Strait's music, trips to the beach, girls' trips, boating, and horses, and was a devoted member of St. Mary's Catholic Church in Windthorst.

Holly is survived by her children, Ethan and Harlee Johnston of Scotland; her parents of Windthorst; her sister, Sabrina Johnston of Florida; grandparents Ralph and Clara Veitenheimer of Windthorst; and many aunts, uncles, cousins, and friends. She was preceded in death by siblings Riley and Gary Scott Johnston, grandparents Clarence and Cindy Johnston, and several aunts and uncles. Services included a vigil and rosary at St. Mary's Catholic Church in Windthorst with a Mass and later interment in Archer City Cemetery. The family suggests memorials to the Scotland, Windthorst, or Archer City Volunteer Fire Departments.

Her obituary can be found at <https://www.auldsfuneralhome.com/obituaries/holly-johnston>



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# 2026 TJA ByLaws Proposal

Vote on these proposed changes during the Annual TJA Board Elections to be held [DATES]. In order to be eligible to vote in this election, you must have an active TJA Membership on or before [DATE] or you must be present at the 40th Annual TJA Conference. Proposed changes are in red below.

For questions on this proposal or the by-laws in general, contact Rowdee Edwards, TJA 1st Vice-President and By-Laws Committee Chair at 972-547-5207 or rjedwards@co.collin.tx.us.



## ARTICLE V – OFFICERS AND EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

### Section 2: Succession and Term of Office

B. The Third Vice-President shall be elected at the annual business meeting.

1. ~~In order~~ To be nominated for election to the office of ~~Third~~ Vice-President ~~or Treasurer~~, each candidate must first have served at least one (1) full year as a Director.

2. In order to be nominated for election to the office of Treasurer, each candidate must first serve at least one (1) year on the Board of Directors in either an eleccted or appointed capacity.

### Section 7: Duties of the Vice-Presidents

B. The First Vice-President shall automatically assume the duties of the Office of the President in the event of death, resignation, temporary disability, removal from office, or otherwise unable or unwilling to perform their duties. and shall carry out those duties for the remainder of the term. He shall maintain close liaison with the President on all matters relating to the Association.

## ARTICLE VIII – COMMITTEES

### Section 1

The ~~five (5)~~ permanent standing committees of the Association shall be the following:

A. Training Committee

1. The Training Committee shall consist of ~~at least three (3) members~~ ~~five (5) members~~. The Second Vice-President shall serve as the Chairperson, and he shall select two (2) board members and two (2) from the general membership to serve on the committee.

B. Membership Committee

1. The Membership Committee shall consist of ~~at least three (3) members, five (5) members~~. The Third Vice- President shall serve as the Chairperson, and he shall select two (2) board members and two (2) from the general membership to serve on the committee.

#### D. Finance Committee

1. The Finance Committee shall consist of ~~at least~~ three (3) members. The President shall serve as the Chairperson. Also included on the committee will be the First Vice-President and the Treasurer.

#### E. By-Laws Committee

The By-Laws Committee shall consist of ~~at least~~ three (3) members. The First Vice-President shall serve as the Chairperson, and he shall select two (2) members from the general membership to serve on the committee.

#### F. Awards Committee

1. The Awards Committee shall consist of five (5) members. The Immediate Past President shall serve as the Chairperson and shall select two (2) past presidents and two (2) board members to serve on the committee.

2. The Chairperson will facilitate discussion with the committee and present the awards at the Annual Business meeting (Conference). The four (4) committee members will vote on the recipients of the awards, and the Chairperson will only vote in the event of a tie.

#### G. Scholarship Committee

1. The Scholarship Committee shall consist of five (5) members. The President shall appoint a Past President as the Chairperson, and the Chairperson shall select two (2) past presidents and two (2) board members to serve on the committee.

2. The Chairperson will facilitate discussion with the committee and present the Scholarship to the recipient. The four (4) committee members will vote on the recipients of the Scholarship, and the Chairperson will only vote in the event of a tie.

#### H. Legislative Committee

1. The Legislative Committee shall consist of three (3) members of the general membership. The President shall appoint the Chairperson, and all committee members.

### **Section 2: Additional Committees**

The President may appoint additional committees and Chairperson to further the business and mission of the Association.



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# A BREATH OF FRESH AIR IN WEST TEXAS:

## Sheriff Whitfield's Vision for Programming and People

**by: Marcy Calnan, J.D., M.Ed.**

In an era where county jails are stretched thin and political narratives can overshadow human needs, Sheriff Robert Whitfield of Yoakum County stands out as a refreshing and principled voice in Texas corrections. He brings a rare combination of humility, courage, curiosity, and follow-through—anchored in the belief that inmate programming is not a partisan talking point, but a human mission that benefits the community, the inmate, and the staff who serve inside the walls every day.

Sheriff Whitfield is open-minded, yet unafraid to speak plainly. He freely admits what he does not know and actively seeks out guidance from those with expertise in education, reentry, and program development. Instead of relying on tradition or assumption, he listens, learns, and implements. When given recommendations on maximizing staff capacity, leveraging community resources, improving funding pathways, or expanding partnerships, he follows through—not on paper, but in practice.

He also refuses to let obstacles become excuses. Objections, resource limitations, and rural isolation do not deter him. If there is a barrier, he finds a way around it—or through it. This mindset is transforming what a small rural jail can look like in West Texas, and it is giving Yoakum County something rare: a culture of possibility.

Just as importantly, Sheriff Whitfield consis-



*Sheriff Robert Whitfield, Yoakum County*

tently looks beyond his own county line. While some leaders focus only on their constituency, he chooses to elevate the corrections profession as a whole. He has hosted TJA regional trainings in a part of the state too often overlooked and underserved, bringing learning opportunities closer to the agencies that need them most. He also invests in his own growth by attending state conferences, studying trends, exploring innovative programming

options, and bringing those ideas and relationships back to Yoakum County for the benefit of his staff and his inmates.

Now, by sharing his experience and perspective at the Texas Jail Association Annual Conference in May 2026, Sheriff Whitfield is helping prepare the next generation of jail leadership in Texas. His message is simple: programming is not politics—it is progress. It is accountability. It is rehabilitation. It is community safety. And it is the work of professionals

who believe every person has value, even on their worst day.

In a state as large and diverse as Texas, it is leaders like Sheriff Whitfield—practical, compassionate, persistent, and future-focused—who remind us that change is not only possible, but achievable, even in the smallest and most remote corners of our state. His example challenges us all to think bigger, serve better, and never lose sight of the humanity in our care.

## Technology Report

The mission of the Technology Committee is to strengthen member engagement and professional visibility through strategic use of digital tools and communication platforms. Our purpose is to deliver timely, accessible, and relevant information that supports TJA's goals of education, connection, and professional development.

Since the last Key Issues update, the committee has expanded TJA's digital presence by launching new social media accounts on YouTube, LinkedIn, Instagram, and X, resulting in significant growth in reach and engagement. We have also updated the TJA website by integrating our video content directly into the site, making it easier for members and visitors to access awareness and educational materials.

The committee continues to upload high-quality awareness videos that support recruitment, educate the public, and highlight the professionalism of correctional officers statewide. These videos are available on all TJA social media platforms and the website. We appre-

ciate the continued partnership with Sidearms Films, who provide professional-grade production.

The TJA app has been enhanced with integrated social media links and, in partnership with the Sales Committee, now offers online merchandise purchasing for added member convenience.

We are also excited to announce the launch of JailTalk, TJA's official podcast, now available on Spotify and YouTube. Episodes already uploaded cover topics including small jail challenges, women in corrections, and an interview with the TJA President.

We welcome feedback and ideas as we continue developing innovative digital content and engagement opportunities. Thank you for your ongoing support of the Technology Committee.

— **Lt. Justin Marinari, Brazos County**  
[jmarinari@brazoscountytexas.gov](mailto:jmarinari@brazoscountytexas.gov)



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**Dear Texas Jail Association,**

As I complete my senior year of college at Sam Houston State University, receiving the TJA Past President Scholarship means more than just financial support; it is a step toward the future I've worked hard for.

This financial contribution is a big help in completing my final year of college, allowing me to focus on preparing for my next chapter which is becoming a peace officer. I have always respected the men and women who serve in uniform for their strength, resilience, and sense of purpose. I recognize how important their roles are during challenging times and the meaningful impact they have, even when their efforts go unnoticed. In preparation for a similar path of service, I have structured my college experience to reflect these values.

I want to express my gratitude and thank the committee for the time and consideration. I am committed to upholding and representing the values of the Texas Jail Association as a scholarship recipient and throughout my future career in the criminal justice field.

Sincerely,

**Logan Dembowski**

## **SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATIONS ARE OPEN!**

Visit the TJA Website for full information and application forms.

### **Jerry Baggs Memorial Scholarship**

The scholarship is for tuition to a class of the National Jail Leadership Command Academy.

### **Past President's Scholarship**

This scholarship is offered to eligible students pursuing a degree at a college or university.

#### **Deadlines**

Fall 2026 Semester - July 1, 2026

Spring 2027 Semester - December 1, 2026

# **The Basics: Current Trends and High Impact Areas of the Jail Operations**

by: Sheleana Davis, Director, TJA

On September 25th and 26th, the Robertson County Sheriff's Office in Franklin, TX hosted their very first Texas Jail Association Regional Training. Field Inspector Mike Garret from the Texas Commission on Jail Standards did an astronomical job of presenting the information on the basics of passing a jail inspection. This training is so important for the rural county jails. The turnout on both days was successful. We had TJA members come from Robertson, Limestone, Falls, Milam, Madison, Fannin, Bosque, Brazos, and Grimes counties. There were even a few people in attendance that did not work in corrections. One Sheriff drove three hours just to come to this training. He wanted to know how he could help support correctional staff. For example, Mr. Garret gave

vital information on how to handle a suicide within a correctional setting. This was helpful for the investigators that attended.

Yes, I am so proud to be a part of the TJA family. I have no doubt that the individuals whom attended this TJA Regional Training left with tools that will help them navigate through their daily jail operations. I would like to thank TJA President Frances Dembowski for afforded me the opportunity to host this training. Sheriff William Ruland for allowing me the opportunity to invite the TJA members to your facility, Instructor Field Inspector Mike Garret for the awesome training sessions, and to all of the TJA members who attended this Regional Training thanks!

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### **40th Annual TJA Conference**

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### **2026 Leadership for Corrections Conference**

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# 2025 JMI OVERVIEW

by: Emily Lopez, TJA Board Secretary  
Jail Administrator, Ward County Sheriff's Office

In September the Texas Jail Association hosted the 2025 Jail Management Issues Conference in Galveston bringing together jail administrators, correctional officers, and sheriffs from across Texas for a week of training, networking, and problem solving. From the moment attendees arrived at the San Luis Resort & Spa and the Galveston Island Convention Center, the energy was high — with record attendance and a sold-out exhibit hall setting the tone.

TJA provided numerous quality training sessions that covered a wide array of topics, making it clear that today's jail professionals face far more than basic security challenges. There were also many opportunities for networking with fellow corrections professionals from all over the state, with the hosting of the Edwardo Jackson Fishing Tournament, The Annual Cornhole Tournament, Women in Corrections Dinner, and of course we can't forget Thursday's Dinner and Casino Night.

A big focus of the conference was on the human side of jail work — from managing mental health and medical needs to addressing staff wellness and burnout. Breakout sessions covered suicide prevention, crisis response, trauma-informed care, and balancing legal compliance with humane treatment. Attendees shared real-world challenges counties are dealing with: increasing numbers of inmates with complex medical or behavioral health needs, limited community mental-health resources, and the pressure that places on staff. At the same time, the conference highlighted promising strategies some facilities are using

to improve care and support both for inmates and staff.

With a sold-out vendor hall, technology and operational best practices also took center stage. A wide array of vendor exhibits demonstrated how modern jail management systems and software companies, jail supply companies and inmate commissary vendors can help agencies stay compliant, increase efficiency, and reduce liability as well as maintain inmate compliance. From classification and intake practices to crisis response and internal investigations — attendees left with practical tools to bring back to their facilities. Across every session, one theme stood out: despite the many challenges, Texas jails are working to adapt, improve, and support their staff and inmates more effectively — and TJA continues to be a vital resource for guidance, training, and community.

As your TJA Board Secretary, I would like to take time to thank each one of our speakers and instructors for being apart of providing exceptional training opportunities, all of our vendors for always making sure we have a sold-out vendor hall providing resources for all jails big or small, as well as all of our sponsors for helping TJA make the conferences happen and helping provide the things we need to make each conference a success.

I hope to see you all soon at the TJA 40th anniversary Annual Conference in San Marcos in May 2026.



# Protecting Lives in Texas Jails with Smart Health Monitoring

A Texas detention center in a major county recently installed 74 wall-mounted sensors. Their purpose? To monitor inmates' breathing and heart rates—without requiring wearables or cameras.

## And other Texas facilities are taking notice.

Texas detention centers are increasingly turning to modern technology to better protect inmates at risk of self-harm, overdose, and medical emergencies. These contactless vital-sign sensors continuously track physiological data. If an inmate's breathing or heart rate drops suddenly, staff receive **real-time alerts**, enabling faster medical intervention. The system is especially effective in **high-risk settings** such as suicide-watch, detox, and medical observation cells.

## Why Smart Monitoring Matters

- Rapid response:** If a sensor detects abnormal breathing or a sudden drop in heart rate, staff receive instant alerts, enabling them to act faster than with traditional 15- or 30-minute cell checks.
- Privacy-first design:** These ceiling-mounted sensors are discreet and non-invasive, making them ideal for use in suicide-watch, detox, and medical observation cells.
- Staff efficiency:** Correctional teams can focus on high-risk cases instead of performing routine checks, improving overall safety and reducing staff strain.

Jails nationwide face a troubling crisis. In 2019, local jails in the U.S. recorded 1,200 inmate deaths—a 5% increase from the previous year—with suicide (49 per 100,000) and drug intoxication (184 deaths) leading the causes in BJS data.

Meanwhile, in Texas, jail fatalities continue to rise: **one county jail reported 12 inmate deaths in 2025**, already matching or exceeding last year's total (Houston Chronicle).



These numbers show the risk that unmonitored inmates face every day. What happens when a heartbeat fades or breathing stops between rounds? A few minutes could mean the difference between life and tragedy.

## How Sensors Make a Difference

The deployed sensor system has already made an impact: real-time alerts have enabled staff to intervene immediately when signs of distress are detected. In one case, the sensors detected a respiratory issue before any visible symptoms—leading to timely medical care and a likely life saved.

Built to withstand the demands of correctional environments, the sensors do more than just alert—they offer **reliable detection 24/7**, giving staff confidence that high-risk inmates are being continuously monitored.



To bring this same level of safety to your facility, **contact Reassurance Solutions for a complimentary demo** of our contactless vital-sign monitoring system. Discover how **one simple installation** can significantly boost inmate well-being, reduce staff burden, and demonstrate proactive care in your jail.

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# 2025 JAIL MANAGEMENT ISSUES

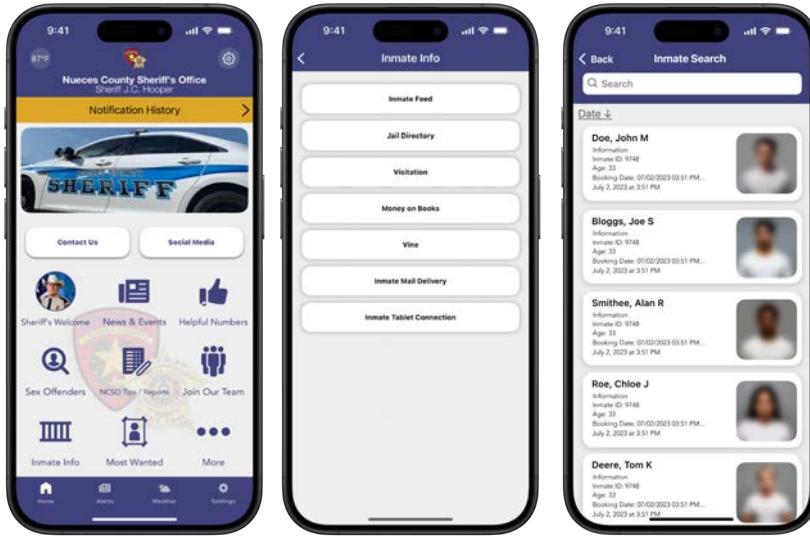


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**Sheriff J.C. Hooper**  
Nueces County Sheriff's Office (TX)

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# Legislative Update

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Senate Bill 8 from the second special session will restrict which private spaces transgender people can use in public buildings — including prisons and jails — based on their sex assigned at birth. Institutions would face a \$25,000 fine for the first violation and a \$125,000 penalty for each subsequent one. The law took effect on Dec. 4th. We urge you to consult with your local attorney to ensure your actions are appropriate.

This Bill amends Subtitle Z, Title 10, Government Code, by adding Chapter 3002, which states:

*Sec. 3002.054. (a) TDCJ shall ensure inmates are housed in a correctional facility, including a dormitory or cellblock of a correctional facility, according to the inmate 's sex.*

However, this also applies to county jails, as well as TDCJ, because, according to Section 3002.001 of the bill, “Correctional facility” has the meaning assigned by Section 1.07 of the Penal Code. And Section 1.07, Penal Code, defines a correctional facility as “*a place designated by law for the confinement of a person arrested for, charged with, or convicted of a criminal offense.*”

The term includes:

- A. *a municipal or county jail;*
- B. *a confinement facility operated by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice;*
- C. *a confinement facility operated under contract with any division of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice;*

In terms of inmate sex, Section 3002.001 of the bill defines “Sex” as an individual ’s biological sex, either male or female.

The bill further defines “female” as “*an individual who naturally has, or will have, or has had or would have but for a congenital anomaly or an intentional or unintentional disruption, a reproductive system designed to produce, transport, and provide eggs for fertilization.*”

And a male as “*an individual who naturally has or will have, or had or would have but for a congenital anomaly or an intentional or unintentional disruption, a reproductive system designed to produce, transport, and utilize sperm for fertilization.*”

|                    |            |              |              |
|--------------------|------------|--------------|--------------|
| Billy Bryan, Chair | Kelly Rowe | Abby McClish | Shane Sowell |
|--------------------|------------|--------------|--------------|

# EDWARDO JACKSON FISHING TOURNAMENT



SEPTEMBER 8, 2025 • GALVESTON, TX

by: **Edwardo Jackson, Past-President, TJA**

The 2025 Fishing Tournament proved to be another memorable event, and it was great to see so many familiar faces out on the water. Sixteen teams took part, filling 64 spots across the boats, and the atmosphere was positive from the moment people arrived for the early morning launch. Summitt Correctional Services helped us kick off the morning by providing breakfast tacos and snacks. A great way to get everyone ready for a full day on the bay!

With the support of our participants and sponsors, we raised \$7,500. A portion of those funds was donated to the 100 Club of Central Texas, an organization we proudly support for the vital work they do assisting corrections, law enforcement, first responders, and their families during difficult times.

I want to personally thank CML, Keefe, and Fechheimer for backing the event. Their support helps make this tournament something our fishing teams look forward to every year.

I also want to recognize our good friend and partner, Jim Harrison from Clear Lake and Galveston Charter. Jim is a big reason this event runs so smoothly each year. He consistently brings together experienced fishing guides who give our teams a real shot at landing the biggest and most impressive catches. His

crew's hard work adds a fun, competitive edge that everyone looks forward to.

Plans for the 2026 tournament are already underway, and we look forward to seeing even more participation as we come together again for a fun day on the water and the camaraderie that keeps this event going strong.



*Shane Dembowski*

# UNLOCKING POTENTIAL IN SMALL JAILS:

How Yoakum County Built a Pathway for Inmate Programming

**BY: MARCY CALNAN, J.D., M.ED.**

Small and rural jails carry the same expectations as their larger urban counterparts, yet they must meet them with fewer staff, fewer services, and fewer dollars. While this imbalance has traditionally limited program opportunities, Yoakum County, Texas, has demonstrated that size is not destiny. Under Sheriff Robert Whitfield's leadership, the county is building a sustainable programming pathway to support rehabilitation, community engagement, and reentry preparation—even in a 48-bed facility. Their journey offers a realistic, replicable model for other rural jails across the state.

## Tablets as More Than Entertainment

One of the earliest lessons from Yoakum County's experience is that tablet systems are not created equal. Many jails sign tablet contracts assuming all vendors provide similar offerings, when in reality, there are significant differences in content, cost structure, functionality, and flexibility. Yoakum County approached tablets as a strategic asset rather than a recreational perk. By selecting a vendor that provides educational and reentry programming—not just movies, games, and music—the county created a digital foundation to support learning, communication, and personal growth. Just as importantly, they took a hard look at the commissary revenue model built into the technology. Because many systems are “pay-to-play,” Sheriff Whitfield insisted that a portion of

commissary revenue generated through tablet use be reinvested directly into programming. With this approach, tablets become both a tool for inmate self-improvement and a revenue stream to fund future program expansion without touching county budget lines.

## Using Commissary Analysis to Fund Change

Before building program offerings, Yoakum County conducted a simple but often overlooked step: a commissary revenue analysis. By studying purchasing trends, item pricing, and profit margins, the Sheriff's Office identified opportunities to maximize returns ethically while avoiding any upward pressure on families. This exercise allowed the county to create a clear roadmap for how commissary profits would be directed back into programming. In a small facility, every dollar matters, and Yoakum County proved sustainable funding can start with data instead of new taxes.

## Building a Community Coalition Through Visibility and Communication

Another turning point came when the Sheriff's Office moved beyond the “closed-door” mindset which often isolates rural jails from their communities. Instead of waiting for volunteers or partners to approach them, Yoakum County actively invited the community in. The agency began establishing a community coalition which features offering facility tours, distributing short digital newsletters, and sharing email updates with local leaders, pastors, educators, and nonprofits. Special events—including a well-attended Community Coalition meeting—helped demystify the jail environment and replace outdated perceptions with a shared sense of mission. By increasing transparency and visibility, the Sheriff's Office is cultivating a network of allies who could contribute time, curriculum, and support services that would have been impossible to generate internally.



## 5 TAKEAWAYS FOR SMALL JAIL LEADERS

- 1. USE** tablets as program platforms, not entertainment, and reinvest revenue into programming.
- 2. CONDUCT** a commissary analysis to create a sustainable funding stream.
- 3. BUILD** a community coalition through tours, newsletters, and outreach.
- 4. STREAMLINE** volunteer onboarding with fast digital processes and coordinated curriculum.
- 5. EXPAND** instructional options through virtual programs and non-traditional partners.

### Streamlining the Volunteer Pipeline

Good intentions are not enough when volunteers have to navigate bureaucratic delays. Yoakum County built a streamlined volunteer workflow starting with an interest form directly on the Sheriff's homepage and which actually arrives in his own inbox as well as his team. Applicants can be processed quickly, provided with a digital orientation, and matched with a curriculum that aligns with current program priorities. This approach prevents duplication and respects volunteer time, while also ensuring programming remains balanced across spiritual, vocational, educational, and life-skills categories. In small jails, momentum is fragile; that is why efficiency matters to maintain volunteer enthusiasm.

### Controlling the Public Narrative with Social Media

Community confidence plays a major role in whether rural jail programming is allowed to thrive. Yoakum County made a deliberate decision to control its narrative by using social media to highlight programming successes. With media agreements in place, they can post graduation photos, certificates, "classroom" snapshots, and partnership spotlights to help shift public perception and reinforce the message that the Sheriff's Office is investing in second chances and safer outcomes. By publicizing the good, the agency builds goodwill, counters misinformation, and strengthens political and community support.

### Leveraging Outside Grants Through Partnerships

Rather than chase complex grants that small jails may not have capacity to administer, Yoakum County was able to identify organizations in nearby regions that were already receiving grant funding. The Sheriff's Office then invited those groups to extend their existing services

into the jail. This strategy allowed the county to bring in an instructor focusing on reentry support without additional administrative burden. The result is a high-value program delivered at minimal cost, expanding access to services that would normally be available only in larger counties.

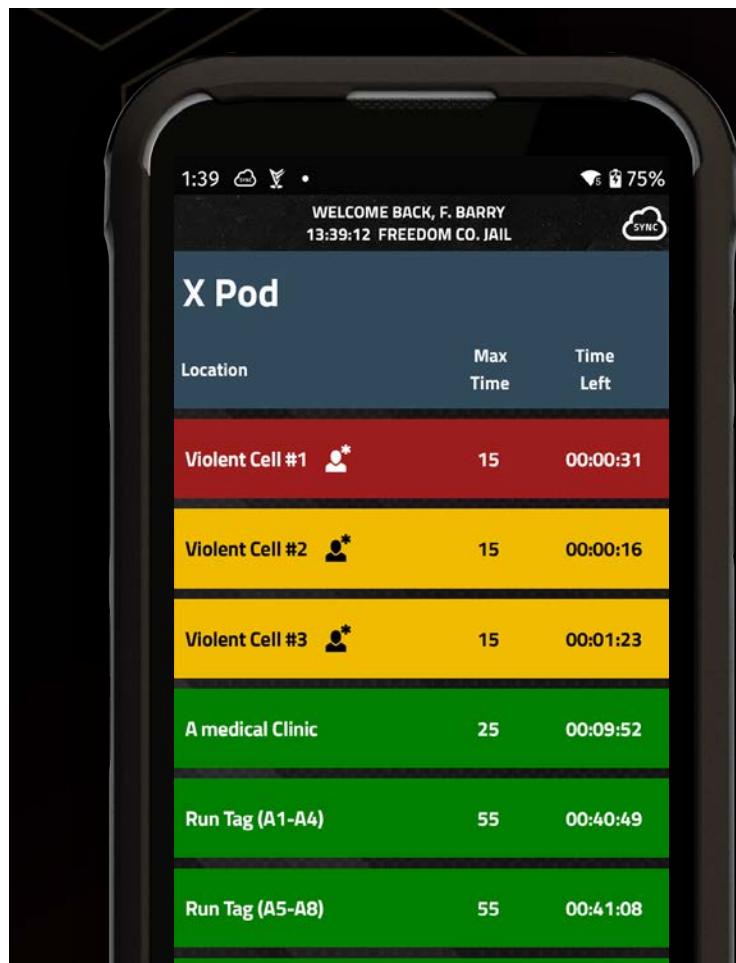
## **Expanding the Definition of “Instructor” and the Boundaries of the Classroom**

Finally, the Sheriff’s Office broadened its definition of who can teach and what qualifies as a classroom. In rural settings, it is not always possible to rely exclusively on local volunteers or in-person partners. Yoakum County embraced the idea of virtual instruction, online curriculum, and non-traditional educators, including librarians, businesses, churches, and life-skills mentors. By viewing the internet as an extension of program space, the county

unlocked access to learning opportunities that had previously seemed out of reach.

## **Conclusion**

The experience of Yoakum County shows that small jails are not doomed by their size. With intentional planning, creative commissary funding strategies, vendor accountability, strong community partnerships, and a willingness to communicate openly, even the most rural facilities can provide meaningful programming that improves staff and inmate morale, supports rehabilitation, and strengthens public trust. The path is not easy, but it is absolutely achievable. In Yoakum County, it began with one simple decision: refuse to accept “small” as an excuse, and start treating it as an opportunity.



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# Building a Dedicated Compliance Team from the Ground Up

by: Lt. Jennifer Segura, Travis County

The landscape of correctional facility management has evolved significantly, driven by enhanced federal, state, and local mandates. Recognizing the critical need for a dedicated, proactive approach to regulatory oversight and liability mitigation, the Travis County Sheriff's Office (TCSO) established its official Standards

and Compliance section in early 2023.

The creation of the Standards and Compliance section marked a pivotal moment in the office's commitment to enhanced oversight and liability mitigation. This initiative, driven by Major Raul Banasco, formalized processes that were once managed by busy operational staff.

Prior to the creation of the S&C team, tasks like responding to Texas Commission on Jail Standards (TCJS) complaints fell partly to dedicated supervisors, who balanced compliance duties with command responsibilities. While these efforts were effective, the increasing complex-



ity of regulatory demands generated the need for a focused team.

The new section hit the ground running with a small team of sergeants and control room operators. They immediately took on critical administrative and inspection duties, including disciplinary boards, grievance responses, and TCJS complaint investigations. The section quickly became a centralized hub, integrating diverse functions such as laundry services, assistance with PREA compliance, and educational programs and chapel security details.

In fact, the team helped guide TCSO to its first-ever flawless inspection in 2024. The section continues to maintain proactive communication with supervisors across the Corrections Bureau to ensure preparation for all inspections, including federal reviews, Fire Marshal inspections, and food service health inspections.

The team continues to integrate new responsibilities, such as:

- Adjunct instructing at the training academy
- Implementation of a sergeant training program
- SOP reviews & updates
- Provide responsive records to paralegals for open records requests
- Recreation team, which serves units without connected yards
- Kitchen and Classifications sections

These continual efforts solidify Standards and Compliance as a cornerstone of modern TCSO correctional operations.

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# BUILDING A FOUNDATION FOR SUCCESS: TRAUMA-INFORMED CULTURE CHANGE IN TRAVIS COUNTY

by: **Karen Ranus, Trauma Informed Program Administrator**

Over the past two years, the Travis County Sheriff's Office has taken bold steps to transform its approach to staff wellness and inmate care through trauma-informed initiatives. Recognizing that correctional environments are saturated with trauma that impacts both incarcerated individuals and the officers who serve them, the agency is committed to a comprehensive culture change. This trauma-informed initiative is focused on building a sustainable foundation for resilience, wellness and safety in alignment with the values upheld by the Texas Jail Association.

## **Understanding the Need**

Data indicates more than 70% of individuals have had at least one traumatic event in their lives. A trauma-informed approach simply recognizes this pervasiveness and attempts to offset the impact. Workforces engaged in trauma-informed work approach everything from environment to policies and programs with a trauma "lens" that strives to prevent or lessen the long-term impact on staff and incarcerated people. Doing so has been shown to increase job satisfaction and staff wellness while reducing staff turnover. Additionally, it has been shown to support effective behavior management and increase safer, more positive interactions in jail settings.

National studies show that 100% of incarcerated

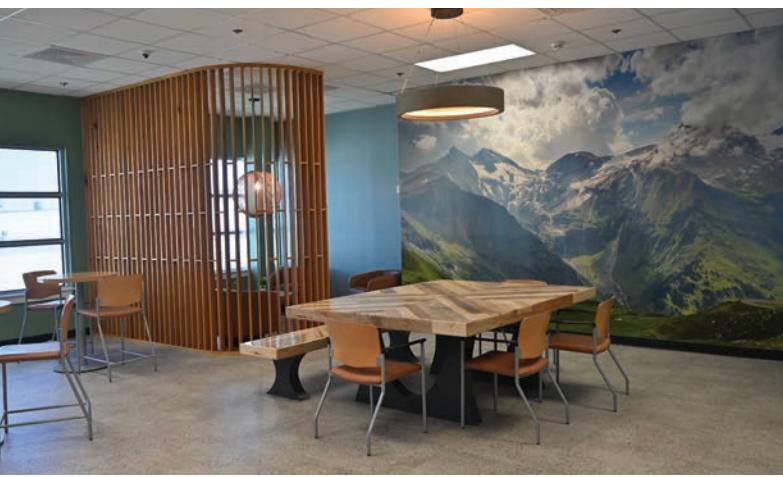
individuals have experienced at least one traumatic event, with nearly 80% reporting four or more. Corrections officers are not immune. More than half report symptoms of PTSD, with average life expectancy reduced by 15 to 18 years compared to the general population. Studies estimate corrections officers have a substantially higher suicide risk compared to other professional fields. These realities underscore the urgency of addressing trauma not as an isolated issue, but as a systemic challenge requiring cultural transformation.

## **Getting Staff Input**

Because choice and collaboration are guiding trauma-informed principles, the sheriff's office places value on getting input from staff to help drive priorities when expanding its resources. In 2024, TCSO distributed its first anonymous, online staff wellness survey. The short (14-question) survey provided valuable feedback while protecting the identity of participants. Results were shared agency-wide, reinforcing transparency and trust. TCSO's command staff used the results to establish priorities for 2025 goals and plans. The survey is now distributed annually, and the 2025 survey saw a 5% increase in staff participation.

## **Changing the Environment**

Trauma-informed environments have been shown to promote physical, mental and social



health. The sheriff's office has received positive feedback about its investments in updating staff break rooms, booking areas and inmate spaces to create calmer, more supportive atmospheres. These changes, though seemingly small (such as paint color), signal to staff that their well-being is valued. They align with trauma-informed principles of safety and trustworthiness, creating environments where staff can decompress and recharge.

### **Launching the POWR Program**

One of the most significant initiatives introduced in the past two years is the Professional Officer Wellness Reset (POWR) Program launched in September 2024. This innovative partnership with a local nonprofit counseling center provides staff with up to ten free and anonymous therapy or acupuncture sessions. The counseling center has more than 50 years of experience providing services to veterans and first responders, making them an ideal partner. Most importantly, a blind billing system ensures confidentiality, which staff have expressed as a feature of utmost importance.

The program has already seen strong staff engagement, with almost 80 employees having received more than 375 sessions of therapy and acupuncture. By removing barriers such as cost and stigma, POWR has created a safe entry point for officers to access mental health care. It represents a tangible investment in staff wellness and a recognition that officers cannot effectively serve others if their own needs remain unaddressed.

### **Building Robust Peer Programs**

Another cornerstone of the culture change effort has been the expansion of TCSO's Peer Support Programs. Research shows that peer support significantly reduces stress, anxiety, and depression among officers, while improving job performance and resilience. The expansion of the program has leadership backing and is focused on more comprehensive train-

ing, clear confidentiality frameworks, and on-going evaluation to support program success.

Most recently, TCSO hired its first dedicated Wellness & Peer Support staff, a deputy with more than a decade with the agency, and a civilian with experience developing and coordinating programs. Like many agencies, the TCSO's Peer Support Program has previously been run by a group of dedicated volunteers. However, having a dedicated team shifts the program from standard crisis response to proactively and regularly connecting with and supporting staff. By fostering trust and connection, the Peer Support Program is primed to help break down the barriers that often keep officers from seeking help.



### Trauma-Informed Training and Awareness

Finally, the agency has prioritized agency-wide training to ensure all staff understand trauma and its impact. While in-person training is ideal, online options offer a way to accommodate shift work. Using the agency's internal Learning Management System (LMS) ensured more than 93% of staff received foundational trauma-informed training in 2025. In post-training evaluations, more than 90% of staff felt the subject matter added value to their career development and was relevant to their job and health. Additionally, trauma-informed language and staff wellness elements are being added to other agency training to support the agency's goal of a holistic and integrated trauma informed approach.



### Making Wellness Accessible

Accessibility has been a priority in TCSO's trauma-informed strategy. While the county offers a mix of diverse health and wellness resources, how to find them proved challenging. Staff now have a simple way to connect with resources through the Wellness Connection, an online repository of staff health and wellness benefits, discounts and resources.

TCSO developed and distributed QR code badges which link staff directly to the information. Later the QR code became a desktop icon on every employee's computer. Most recently, staff received a mailer which included a refrigerator magnet and information to share with family or roommates. These thoughtful efforts make resources visible, easy to access, and consistently reinforced.

### Looking Ahead

Culture change is a long-term commitment, requiring a minimum of three years of sustained effort. Yet the progress made at the Travis County Sheriff's Office over the past two years demonstrates what is possible when leadership, staff, and community partners align a shared vision. The ultimate goal is clear: a healthier, safer, and more resilient workforce, better equipped to serve both incarcerated individuals and the broader community. In Travis County, trauma-informed culture change is not just a concept—it is becoming a lived reality.

# What's Happening Around the State?

## KENDALL COUNTY Canine Care Program

Through a collaborative effort between Kendall County jail staff and partners at the Kendall County Animal Shelter, we introduced a canine care program designed to give overlooked dogs a chance at recovery—and, along the way, offer something meaningful to the people who care for them. As of this writing we have fostered 10 dogs in the Kendall County jail and successfully found forever homes for these dogs.

## KENDALL COUNTY Awards

Officers **Isaac Salazar** and **Garland Corn-well** receive Life Saving Commendation Awards for their swift action in saving the life of an inmate who attempted suicide in the Kendall County jail in early October.



## KENDALL COUNTY Corporal Evan Profeta's Dedication Shines On and Off Duty

Discipline, consistency, and commitment—traits that make a great officer and, as it turns out, a top-tier athlete. **Corporal Evan Profeta** of Kendall County recently showcased all three at the 2025 NPC Branch Warren Classic, making his competitive bodybuilding debut with an outstanding performance.



Corporal Profeta took home 1st Place Overall in Novice Men's Physique, 2nd Place in Open Class D Men's Physique, and placed 7th in Open Class B Men's Classic Physique. These results are remarkable for a first-time competitor and speak volumes about his work ethic both inside and outside of the uniform.



# What's Happening Around the State?

Profeta credits much of his success to the support of his coach, family, and friends. "Your encouragement carried me through every rep, every early morning, and every tough moment," he shared. His humility, paired with a relentless drive to improve, is exactly what makes him a valued member of the Kendall County team.



This event marks not just a personal milestone, but the beginning of a new chapter. As he looks ahead to the 2026 season, Profeta says he's more motivated than ever: "A bigger, sharper, and more complete package is on the way."

Congratulations to Corporal Profeta for representing Kendall County with pride, perseverance, and passion—both on the job and on the stage.

## TRAVIS COUNTY Promotions

On August 20, 2025, Travis County Sheriff Sally Hernandez promoted two staff members: **Dominique Gereaux** and **Ryan Kruger** to Corrections Bureau Sergeant.



[Ryan Kruger and Dominique Gereaux](#)

On October 9, 2025, Travis County Sheriff Sally Hernandez promoted four staff members: **Steve McBride** to Corrections Bureau Lieutenant; and **Christian Salas, Samaria Harrison, and Matt Balagia** to Corrections Bureau Sergeant.

# What's Happening Around the State?



Christian Salas, Samaria Harrison, Steve McBride, Matthew Balagia

On November 25, 2025, Travis County Sheriff Sally Hernandez promoted 1 staff member: **Darnell Dail** Corrections Bureau Lieutenant.



Darnell Dail

On December 11, 2025, Travis County Sheriff Sally Hernandez promoted three staff members: **Gilbert Jordan, Tinna Tapia** and **Robin Gutierrez** to Corrections Bureau Sergeant.



Gilbert Jordan, Robin Gutierrez, Tinna Tapia

## TRAVIS COUNTY

### Travis County Sheriff's Office Field Training Officer Appreciation Day

by: Lt. Michael Suhr

On October 28, 2025, Travis County Sheriff's Office Field Training Officers (FTOs) gathered at McKinney Roughs Nature Park to celebrate their dedicated Field Training Officers during the annual FTO Appreciation Event. The day was filled with gratitude, camaraderie, and recognition of those who play a pivotal role in shaping the department's future.



# What's Happening Around the State?



The event began with the FTOs dividing into groups for a series of team-building activities. One of the highlights was the “tree puzzle,” which required teamwork and trust, as blindfolded participants relied on their teammates’ guidance to locate and assemble

puzzle pieces. The rope course and zip line challenged participants to overcome their fears and, quite literally, reach new heights.



A delicious barbecue lunch followed, accompanied by words of encouragement, appreciation, and motivation from Chief Deputy Anthony Johnson and Major Raul Banasco.

After lunch, the FTOs put their skills to the

# What's Happening Around the State?



test at the archery and paintball ranges, where friendly competition and teamwork were on full display as scores were tallied for prizes.

The day concluded with the presentation of prizes and certificates recognizing FTOs who have been part of the program for more than three years. The FTO Appreciation Event served as a heartfelt reminder that leadership and mentorship are at the core of the department's success. As the event came to a close, attendees left inspired to continue fostering growth, teamwork, and excellence within the ranks.

A special thank-you goes to the staff at McKinney Roughs Nature Park for their hospitality and support in making the day a tremendous success.

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# Nominations Report

As we approach the 40th Annual Conference, it prompts another election for the Texas Jail Association Board of Directors. I know many of you attend one or both conferences and may have wondered, "Do they ever need help?" The simple answer is yes—your Board of Directors certainly needs all the help it can get. Or maybe you're thinking, "I might want to be a part of the decision-making process for members across the great state of Texas."

Now it is your turn to get involved in a very rewarding way. The Texas Jail Association has been around since 1986, with strong traditions rooted in its history, and now it's time for you to plant your roots in that history.

If you're interested or have questions, reach out to your Board of Directors and let's work together to build a better future for our profession.

Rowdee Edwards, Chair

Abigail McClish

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