



Municipal Court

**The Court's Perspective on the Kansas City
Detention and Rehabilitation Center**

Q&A

September 20, 2022

Q: Why does Kansas City need a detention and rehabilitation center?

A: Detention facilities are used by courts to ensure that defendants participate in the criminal justice process which includes rehabilitation. For the majority of municipal court cases, no purpose is served by detention. However, there remains a substantial number of cases involving violence, threats of violence, property destruction, theft, and trespass that present problems that are best addressed by the appropriate use of a detention and rehabilitation facility. Among these offenders, those with mental illness and/or substance use disorders are much more likely to reoffend, avoid treatment, fail to follow court orders and miss court dates.

Most defendants in the municipal jail population present with mental illness and/or substance use disorders. To deal with this reality, Kansas City has developed a robust and nationally recognized array of treatment courts, including Veterans Treatment Court, Mental Health Court, Drug Court, Domestic Violence Compliance Docket and Domestic Violence Drug Court. Defendant participation in a specialty court is a voluntary process which may lead to probation violation hearings and warrants for failure to appear in court. Such a person may end up in a detention and rehabilitation center. For those with mental illness and/or substance intoxication, this provides a period of time for stabilization before court appearance. Defendants that are not stabilized may be a risk to public safety.

The existence of a detention facility may serve as the first good reason that comes to mind for defendants to show up in court and comply with court orders. But the higher purpose of this facility is to address the underlying issues that are obstacles in the path toward rehabilitation.

Q: Where are Kansas City’s inmates being held now?

A: Individuals held by the Kansas City Municipal Court are currently housed at the Vernon and Johnson County jails. It is a 90-minute drive to transport those inmates, one-way, to Vernon County and is a 60-minute drive to transport inmates, one-way, to Johnson County.

Q: What is the capacity for individuals that are committed to the custody Kansas City by the Municipal Court?

A: Kansas City currently does not have sufficient beds for those needing detention and rehabilitative services. In 1971, Kansas City had 348 beds at the Municipal Correctional Institution for pretrial and sentenced inmates from the Kansas City Municipal Court in addition to the 100 beds on the 8th floor of the KCPD headquarters. From 2009 to 2019, the available bed capacity was reduced to 275 combined beds between the KCPD and City through a contractual relationship with Jackson County, Missouri. In 2019, Jackson County ended the contractual relationship with the City. Currently, there are 70 available beds at Vernon County. There are 35 available beds at Johnson County. City inmates are currently being released over the objection of Kansas City Municipal Court judges because there is insufficient space and contractual relationships. These county jails are not equipped to house inmates who have severe medical, mental health, or behavioral issues and are releasing these inmates regardless of their sentence or bond.

Judge Corey A. Carter, Division 201	Judge Katherine B. Emke, Division 206
Judge Michael C. Heffernon, Division 202	Judge Anne J. LaBella, Division 207
Judge Courtney A. Wachal, Division 203	Judge Martina L. Peterson, Division 208
Judge Keith R. Ludwig, Division 204	Judge Todd D. Wilcher, Division 209
Judge Ardie A. Bland, Division 205	Megan Fuller Pfannenstiel, Court Administrator

Q. Why can't the City of Kansas City inmates be held at the Jackson County Jail?

A: The needs of Kansas City inmates are completely different from the needs of Jackson County inmates. The average length of detention for a Municipal Court inmate is 1.68 days for those not sentenced and 53.7 days for those that receive a sentence. The average length of detention for a male in the Jackson County jail is 226 days. (JCDC Jail Needs Validation, p. 40). The short duration of stay for a person detained on a municipal charge requires much more staff time and attention at intake and release than a person held on a state charge. The cost of housing, food and related services is higher with a population that is less constant. Jackson County houses inmates awaiting trial for felony offenses which, if found guilty, will likely result in further prison incarceration. Kansas City Municipal Court sentences and detains inmates for stabilization and re-entry purposes. Many of those individuals require extensive mental health services and medication that are costly to obtain and administer. This population requires a higher degree of either isolation or segregation along with increased movements to both medical appointments and court hearings during this stabilization process.

Q: What will be different about the Kansas City Detention and Rehabilitation Center?

A: The plan for the Kansas City Detention and Rehabilitation Center drafted by the SFS, Dewberry, Pulitzer/Bogard partnership was created with a social justice mindset that promotes behavior change. The plan was designed after the completion of a 58-page needs assessment of the current Kansas City detention center, which was also done by the SFS, Dewberry, Pulitzer/Bogard partnership. The Kansas City Detention and Rehabilitation Center will focus on recidivism reduction through re-entry programming. It has a 310-bed capacity.

The plan includes:

1. A City-owned Detention and Rehabilitation Center (DRC) to provide basic and essential services for inmates.
2. Immediate medical and mental health triage and assessments.
3. Accountable engagement in treatment. After inmates are stable and engaged in the detention center they will be transitioned to treatment and services in the community.
4. A Community Resources Center (CRC) to provide continued access for released or non-incarcerated defendants to community treatment, programs, and re-entry services.

The preliminary site location is the Heart of America airport, which is 49 acres of city-owned property on the east side of Kansas City, south of US Highway 40.

Q: This sounds expensive... Can't we do it for less?

A: The cost estimates for this plan are adjusted for the unpredictability of the current market and include population growth and arrest estimates to accommodate the needs of the Kansas City over the next 25 years. The Municipal Court continues to improve and develop innovative programming to rehabilitate the offenders that come into its jurisdiction. This approach of social justice gives offenders the tools they need to become productive members of society, which in turn keeps Kansas City safe and thriving. It cannot do so successfully without the tools that the proposed Detention and Rehabilitation Center provides.

Data used in this Q&A was gathered from the Kansas City Detention Center Needs Assessment Population Trend Analysis and Forecasts, July 2020 and the Kansas City Detention and Rehabilitation Center Project Overview City Council Presentation, August 2022, both produced by SFS, Dewberry, Pulitzer/Bogard Partnership.



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The mission of the Kansas City Municipal Court is to provide exceptional service by ensuring fair, timely and impartial judicial processing through innovation, efficiencies, and by addressing the underlying causes of recidivism.

The Kansas City Municipal Court aspires to be recognized-locally, nationally and internationally-as the most efficient and technologically advanced municipal court in existence that provides comprehensive services.