



# County Technical Assistance Service

Published on e-Li (<https://eli.ctas.tennessee.edu>)

April 17, 2021

## Duty to Build and Maintain Jail

---

Dear Reader:

The following document was created from the CTAS electronic library known as e-Li. This online library is maintained daily by CTAS staff and seeks to represent the most current information regarding issues relative to Tennessee county government.

We hope this information will be useful to you; reference to it will assist you with many of the questions that will arise in your tenure with county government. However, the *Tennessee Code Annotated* and other relevant laws or regulations should always be consulted before any action is taken based upon the contents of this document.

Please feel free to contact us if you have questions or comments regarding this information or any other e-Li material.

Sincerely,

The University of Tennessee  
County Technical Assistance Service  
226 Capitol Blvd. Suite 400  
Nashville, TN. 37219  
615-532-3555 phone  
615-532-3699 fax  
[ctas@tennessee.edu](mailto:ctas@tennessee.edu)  
[www.ctas.tennessee.edu](http://www.ctas.tennessee.edu)

## Table of Contents

Duty to Build and Maintain Jail .....	3
---------------------------------------	---

## Duty to Build and Maintain Jail

**Reference Number:** CTAS-1334

It is the duty of the county legislative body to erect a jail and to keep it in order and repair at the expense of the county, and it may levy a special tax for this purpose. T.C.A. §§ 5-7-104 and 5-7-106. *Ellis v. State*, 20 S.W. 500 (Tenn. 1892); *Henry v. Grainger County*, 290 S.W. 2 (Tenn. 1926); *Storie v. Norman*, 130 S.W.2d 101 (Tenn. 1939) (It is the duty of the county court to erect a jail and keep it in repair at the expense of the county, and it may levy a special tax for that purpose.); *Brock v. Warren County*, 713 F.Supp. 238, 243 (E.D. Tenn. 1989) (holding county liable for commissioners' failure to provide sufficient funds for a habitable jail or training of guards). A facility preventative maintenance program shall be in place. All equipment shall be in working order. Safety and security equipment shall be repaired or replaced without undue delay. The use of padlocks and/or chains to secure inmate cells or housing area doors is prohibited. [Rules of the Tennessee Corrections Institute, Rule 1400-1-.05\(9\) and \(10\)](#).

In construing the provisions of similar Alabama statutes (compare T.C.A. §§ 5-7-104, 5-7-106, and 5-7-110 with Ala. Code §§ 11-14-10 and 11-14-13), the Alabama courts have made it clear that the duty of the county to erect and maintain a county jail pertains exclusively to the physical plant of the jail. The duty to "maintain a jail" under § 11-14-10 is merely the duty to keep the "jail and all equipment therein in a state of repair and to preserve it from failure or decline." *Turquitt v. Jefferson County*, 137 F.3d 1285, 1290 (11th Cir. 1998) *citing Keeton v. Fayette County*, 558 So.2d 884, 886 (Ala. 1989). Accordingly, "the County will have violated Plaintiffs' Eighth Amendment rights if its failure to maintain the Jail constituted deliberate indifference to a substantial risk of serious harm to the prisoners." *Marsh v. Butler County*, 268 F.3d 1014, 1027 (11th Cir. 2001).

Where a municipal body is vested with this sort of fiscal obligation to a jail, its liability for insufficient funding or maintenance will depend on its knowledge of conditions at the jail. *O'Quinn v. Manuel*, 773 F.2d 605, 609 (5th Cir. 1985) (Clearly the [municipality] had a duty to fund and maintain the Jail.). In *Strandell v. Jackson County*, 634 F.Supp. 824, 830 (S.D. Ill. 1986), the court found that the allegations in the complaint, that Jackson County provided inadequate funding for its jail facility and had failed to maintain the jail facility in conformity with state law and constitutional standards, were sufficient to satisfy the "custom" requirement, and that plaintiffs had therefore stated a cause of action against the county. And in *Littlefield v. Deland*, 641 F.2d 729, 732 (10th Cir.1981), the court upheld a finding of county liability for grossly inadequate facilities for mentally ill detainees where the "nature and extent of jail facilities" were under the county commissioners' control. Even though the facilities' inadequacy had been repeatedly brought to the county commissioners' attention, the county had "pursued a policy of indifference" that justified holding the county liable for damages under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 based upon the failure of its commissioners to adequately fund the county jail.

In a more recent case, *May v. County of Trumbull*, 127 F.3d 1102 (Table) (6th Cir. 1997), the plaintiff argued "that inadequate funding of the jail and the resulting understaffing of the facility rose to the level of deliberate indifference sufficient to support § 1983 liability for Trumbull County." The Sixth Circuit held that the county's policy decisions and allocation of resources could not form the basis for municipal liability under § 1983 because the evidence presented did not show that the county "made its funding and staffing decisions with a known risk of the potential for detainees' suicides and a conscious disregard of that risk." *Id.* at \*3, *citing Roberts v. City of Troy*, 773 F.2d 720, 725 (6th Cir. 1985) (holding that funding and staffing decisions, even where they did not comply with regulations, could not form the basis for a charge of deliberate indifference because intent and cause had not been demonstrated). See also *Gaston v. Ploeger*, --- F.Supp.2d ---, 2005 WL 3079099, \*11 (D. Kan. 2005) (entering summary judgment in favor of county commissioners in their official capacity on plaintiff's § 1983 claims based upon inadequate funding).

Nevertheless, if the county chooses to run a jail it must do so without depriving inmates of the rights guaranteed to them by the federal Constitution. "It is well established that inadequate funding will not excuse the perpetuation of unconstitutional conditions of confinement nor will an allegedly contrary duty at state law." *Smith v. Sullivan*, 611 F.2d 1039, 1043-1044 (5th Cir. 1980) (citations omitted). See also *Newman v. State of Alabama*, 559 F.2d 283, 286, 291 (5th Cir. 1977) (It should not need repeating that compliance with constitutional standards may not be frustrated by legislative inaction or failure to provide the necessary funds.); *Williams v. Edwards*, 547 F.2d 1206, 1213 (5th Cir. 1977) (Thus lack of funds does not justify operating a prison in an unconstitutional manner.); *Laube v. Haley*, 234 F.Supp.2d 1227, 1252 (M.D. Ala. 2002) (Courts have repeatedly made clear that cost is not a defense to constitutional violations.); *Nichol-*

*son v. Choctaw County*, 498 F.Supp. 295, 311 (S.D. Ala. 1980) (The decision to withhold resources from the jail cannot be an adequate justification for depriving inmates of their constitutional rights and of their rights under state law.).

---

**Source URL:** <https://eli.ctas.tennessee.edu/reference/duty-build-and-maintain-jail>

