Jail Consolidation & Regionalization

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**Introduction**

The question of whether local jails should consolidate into regional facilities or other types of joint-jurisdiction facilities is relevant across the United States. A number of examples of successful consolidations exist, with similar references to unsuccessful attempts at consolidation and the use of shared services. Research in the past two decades reflects solutions ranging from jail closure, transition of jails to holding facilities until transfer to larger permanent jail accommodation, regionalization of several smaller municipal and/or county jails into a larger facility with pay-per-bed agreements, and decisions not to consolidate but to maintain present local jail presence.

The scope of the potential for jail consolidation extends beyond just the facility itself and taxpayer consideration extends beyond just the money allocated to the jail. Communities can be impacted in positive and negative ways through changes to tax bases, economic impact to local business, and potential loss of jobs in communities changing jail services. Support and resistance for consolidation will come from different sectors of the community and the criminal justice system based on the impacts felt by each area and their role in or with the current jail situation; therefore, the literature includes several suggestions and recommendations for proceeding with analysis to determine the best solution for departments and communities.

Literature reviewed includes policy analysis, industry reporting, city, county, and state examples, and scholarly research. The literature is reflective of information from within the last 10-15 years and provides different points for consideration in any decision for jail consolidation. This report does not make a recommendation for or against jail consolidation as those decisions must be made at the agency level, but does provide examples of success and failures in addition to questions that must be asked to determine the best course of action when making the final decision.

In the state of Illinois, consideration must also be given to the findings of the Illinois State Commission on Criminal Justice and Sentencing Reform. **Final Report: Part I** was issued in December 2015 and addresses the issue of potentially using jails as alternatives to short term incarceration for those individuals serving less than a 12 month sentence (p. 2).

**Overview of Correctional Populations in the United States & Illinois – Inmates & Staff**

The most recent report from the Bureau of Justice Statistics (2016) indicates in the year 2000, 621,100 inmates were housed in local jails throughout the United States. At year’s end 2014, that number had risen to 744,600 in local jails.

As of December 31, 2013, the state of Illinois housed approximately 20,600 inmates within its jail facilities (Minton, Ginder, Brumbaugh, Smiley-McDonald, and Rohloff, 2015). In 1999 jails in Illinois housed approximately 16,880 offenders, reflecting a 22% increase in individuals confined in Illinois jails over the past 14 years. While these numbers reflect those individuals confined in jails, the total admissions into Illinois jails paints a broader
picture of the activity occurring in the jail system throughout the state. In 2013, the total number of admissions to local jails in Illinois was more than 314,000 and the average daily population was approximately 22,200. This is indicative of the transient nature of the jail population as the average expected length of stay was 26 days.

Approximately 6,500 correctional officers were employed throughout the state of Illinois in local jails in 2013, including deputies, monitors, and other custody staff (Minton, et. al, 2015).

**Literature Review**

Much of the literature reflected discussions of city-county consolidation, law enforcement consolidation (street level vs. corrections), and communication/dispatch centers. Jail consolidation research and policy discussion was often reflective of potential state takeover due to jail issues within certain areas. While the research findings sometimes targeted areas outside specific jail consolidation research, the information is still relevant and targeted areas of consideration necessary to any agency looking to consolidate or share resources at the local level.

**Organizational Arrangement**

In 2000, Ray and O'Meara-Wyman published an article on considerations that local jurisdictions could take when deliberating a realignment of jail services. They identified seven specific options for organizational arrangement and emphasized that these options can be adjusted and realigned to meet the needs of a regionalization plan. Despite having numerous options to choose from and mix and match, a number of questions must be asked and data gathered that reflects the best option for determining if regionalization or consolidation is the best answer or if maintaining the current jail system is the best response to issues identified.

**WPRI**

The Wisconsin Policy Research Institute published a report on consolidating law enforcement agencies in Dane County (Madison area). While the county encompasses 25 law enforcement agencies and 60 governmental entities, the report identified a number of relevant questions that need to be considered for any type of consolidation effort with law enforcement and/or corrections agencies. The Dane County project targeted consolidation of services based on budget deficits and the need to “examine savings in local government” (p. 1). Questions asked through the project analysis included:

**Overarching Questions:**

- What are the potential cost savings?
- What is the current tax burden? How would a consolidation effort impact the state of Illinois and the county(ies) involved?
- How many other law enforcement agencies that use the jail would be impacted?
A consortium of local jurisdictions agree to operate a regional facility for both pretrial and sentenced inmates. Share control through governing board of members from jurisdictions and share funding.

Some jurisdictions continue to operate own facilities, at reduced or limited level. Facilities usually designed for pretrial only and respond to geographic and/or court system needs.

Regional operation facility is designed and operated only for specific sentenced offenders. All jurisdictions operate own jails for pretrial and sentenced inmates based on needs and attributes of jurisdictions.

Regional facility manages pretrial and convicted inmates. Only portions of participating jurisdictions continue to operate own facilities.

Local facility accepts referrals from other participating jurisdictions, including the state. Specific inmate types: work-release, low to medium risk offenders, male, female, etc. Jurisdictions charge a "fee-for-service" or daily bed rate for actual inmates housed.

Single jurisdiction accepts pretrial and/or sentenced inmates on fee-for-service basis. Total control remains with operating jurisdiction.

Total consolidation of city-county jurisdiction inmates, resources, and governance.

Specific Questions Related to current jail and county considerations:

- How many officers per capita (per inmate) and what is the expenditure per officer? While the “law enforcement” aspect of this reflects the community at large, the corrections aspect would reflect the “community” as the jail inmates being served.
- What is the recommended officer per inmate ratio for the jail of your size? Is the recommended size met? Over or under the recommended standard?
- What are the primary components of the savings? (i.e. personnel, money to alternative programs that might reduce offending/recidivism, etc.)
- What would happen to corrections staff? Would they be transitioned to street patrols or other duties? What does this potentially do for community safety and reduced costs of crime in the county?
- With an attempt at regionalization or shared services, what would the impact be on the motor pool? If corrections officers are transitioned into the community, will more vehicles be needed for the county?
- What impact would be felt with regard to transportation for inmates to the new location, whether regional or in a different county? With different law enforcement agencies in the county, what would their costs be if they must transport inmates to a new location? Will this add to the burden for the other agencies in the county? What burden would this place on transportation for court appearances and other transport activities?

Other considerations were recommended in the report with regard to a transition to a new consolidated effort:

- When deliberating a regionalization that includes the potential housing of one county’s offenders into another county jail or regional facility, the nuances between counties/regions must be taken into consideration with regard to the way inmates are managed. While consistency should be found among jail management, issues such as types of services available to inmates may be different; policies may deviate from what has been in place in the current jail based on the facility itself and regional/county standards; judicial policies and practices may vary; and politics of the area may clash with the current area’s standard practices.
- Corrections officers in some areas may be sworn while in others the standard may vary and they may not be sworn law enforcement officers. Will there be cost involved in training and certification for individuals being transitioned to the community or transitioned to a different department?
- If a regional effort is made to consolidate and personnel (custody and non-custody) are to transition over, consistent information must be gathered related to expenditures as these may vary from county to county.

**Sparks, Nevada**

In 2008 the City of Sparks, Nevada prepared a perspective on consolidation based on economic challenges and the need for cost-cutting measures (Mellinger, Minton, & Driscoll, 2008). Researchers considered a number of avenues of gathering information, including other areas that had consolidated services, case studies, and comments from directors of
different divisions on opportunities and challenges of consolidation efforts. The chief of police provided a list of advantages and disadvantages to consolidation efforts for the law enforcement services, including a number of relationships and agreements that had already been established to assist in multi-agency, multi-jurisdictional activities. Advantages as they related to this report included:

- Greater economies of scale
- Increased effectiveness and flexibility with manpower
- Combined purchasing of materials (one agency versus several)
- Increased technology opportunities
- Improved coordination of services

Disadvantages or arguments against included:

- Expensive transitional costs
- Loss of control
- Reduced efficiency/increased costs (potential)
- Command staff experience and representation issues
- Citizen satisfaction
- Loss of sense of community/county relationship
- Distribution of control and resources
- Different crimes in different jurisdictions – would this be an issue with supervision in a consolidated jail?

The chief identified that a number of initiatives were already in place via MOUs and other agreements for regional services. The impact of these agreements would also need to be taken into consideration with a potential jail consolidation including if there would be any negative effects to the agreements.

**CRREO**

One of the most comprehensive reports on collaborative approaches to jailing (included in full as Appendix A) is from the Center for Research, Regional Education and Outreach (CRREO) at the State University of New York at New Paltz (Benjamin & Simons, 2009). Researchers addressed the issue due to considerable overspending in the building of new facilities and the ability of counties to collaborate for cost savings without building new facilities and with cost savings. The considerations of this research are similar to other literature identified herein, but the in-depth nature of the CRREO report provides an exhaustive view of the considerations that should be taken when deliberating consolidation.

One major component of the CRREO report is the concept of “paradigm shift” in thinking. There must be a shift to thinking regionally and not county by county. Each county may not have the capacity separately but when considered at a regional level, there may be sufficient capacity even at peak need time. The paradigm shift in thinking cannot be just in terms of one location, but all locations in surrounding counties/areas. This paradigm shift raises different questions that must be asked and answered in order to make an informed
Questions

• What is the jail capacity in surrounding counties?
• Who has to approve a consolidation? Are state laws, local ordinances, etc. in place that require counties to house their own inmates? What is required to get an exception?
• Are there required standards for the jails that have to be met? What impact might using one jail instead of another have on compliance with these standards?
• What are the reasons for the need for regionalization? (overcrowding/not enough inmates, antiquated facilities, inappropriate incarceration, marginal use of alternatives, lack of financial and public support?)
• Are there other alternatives to incarceration - community corrections, specialty courts, etc that should also be considered?
• Is it feasible to "board out" inmates?
• What are the impacts of state offenders on parole for the local jails? Is there enough funding to cover costs of these offenders in the system as well? (For Illinois, how will the new sentencing reform rules impact jails?)

Needs

• Political will; laws & regulations amended; formal intergovernmental agreements among counties
• Take into consideration different types of inmates (male, female, adolescent, adult, sentenced & un-sentenced, addicted, health - physical and mental health)
• Maintenance of financial responsibility of inmate no matter where located
• Identify real costs and not hypothetical ones (i.e., transportation costs; often the solution is equidistant in different counties and costs might not actually be greater with a regional effort)
• Must consider technology in the equation (court appearances, information sharing)
• The entire criminal justice system may not be regionalized (law enforcement, courts, communications, etc.) but still need to be brought into the conversation to consider impacts (technology, electronic court appearances, visits, etc.)
Potential Outcomes

- If new building is required after other considerations, it can cost a lot of money and go beyond anticipated costs
- Using a regional approach may still help local governments keep size, character, and cost in check even if new building is required
- Achieving Economies of Scale - achieving better prices in goods and services, lowering cost to government (i.e. drugs, canteen items, etc.)
- Ability to concentrate certain offenders in certain facilities to reduce cost and improve provision of services
- Improvement in technology and communication

North Carolina

In 2010, Dr. Michael Sanera discussed the state of jails in North Carolina. The issue in many jails was related to overcrowding and the need to expand capacity. As part of a summit, Dr. Sanera, along with the Cumberland County (NC) sheriff, county attorney, a representative from the National Institute of Corrections (NIC), the NC secretary of correction, and representatives from Duke University. A number of other local representatives were also included (county manager, city managers, local police chiefs, judges, community corrections). Issues related to available options were discussed and specific areas were identified that needed to be considered when making decisions about how to proceed.

- What are the potential cost savings with a multi-county jail? Each county would gain and/or lose something with a transition to a new multi-county facility.
- Sheriffs would give up supervision to an administrator and independent oversight board. How would this work with regard to the current situation? If considering a jail consolidation, who would be in control and how would decision-making occur?
- Joint funding would have to be considered. What would jurisdictions contribute (municipalities, counties, others)? How would decisions be made as to who contributes how much?
- Contracts with neighboring counties would have to be implemented. What negotiations would have to take place for agreements to be reached to mutual satisfaction among jurisdictions?
- Technology considerations, such as video conferencing for minor court appearances may be a solution to some of the transportation issues but judges and court systems
would need to be included in the discussions. Expansion of technology uses could be considered for more significant court appearances (i.e. guilty pleas, sentencing) if the jail is not located at the courthouse.

- Discussion was also considered of private jails but for the state of North Carolina jails this was only an option for prisons and not for jails via state law.

NACO (2012) also recommended several ideas related to consolidation of services:

- Define the reasons for consolidation – perhaps improved service delivery; improvement through economies of scale and combining functions; image improvement;
- Evaluate the consolidation impact on responsibilities – What role does each sheriff play in the treatment of offenders housed in a regional/consolidated facility? How will conflict between sheriffs' duties be resolved?
- If gaps exist in provision of services to inmates (i.e. treatment programs, medical services, mental health, education, etc.), there may be more opposition to the transition
- Who is the “head” of the jail if there are several counties with inmates housed there?

Case Study- Gloucester - Cumberland County, New Jersey (2013)

In 2013, the Gloucester County Freeholder Board (NJ) proposed closing the Gloucester County Jail and entering a shared services agreement with Cumberland County (NJ). The concept was to phase out one jail and send inmates to other facilities. The idea acknowledged the agreement would save money for one community (Gloucester County) and reduce the budget deficit for the other facility (Cumberland County) through the addition of inmates and payments from Gloucester County. The payments would not cost as much as full operation of the Gloucester County jail, potentially saving millions of dollars. The transition also allowed other jails with empty cells to fill them and reduce costs. Short-term considerations (limitations on the number of available cells) and long term issues (shared services allowing all inmates to eventually move) had to be taken into consideration, in addition to male, female, and juvenile populations that would need to transition.

Correctional officers were opposed to the plan. A number of issues were anticipated to impact employees as well: scale back of staff, layoffs, Cumberland County accepting employees at their facility (corrections officers, nurses, support staff, etc.), and those not taken being placed on the top of list for other jobs. (i.e. 120 uniformed offices would be reduced to 33 officers for transport from Gloucester County). Other concerns for corrections officers and law enforcement included the transportation time taking officers off the street for extended periods of time and having to transport potentially dangerous criminals. The jail was closed and in 2014, reports indicated the closure and shared services agreement was a success. The transportation issue was resolved by maintaining corrections officers to perform the transport so as not to keep law enforcement off the streets. The cost for inmates to be housed in the Cumberland, Salem, and Burlington jails declined from $100 to $83 per-inmate per day. The regionalization of jail services also reportedly saved $3.5 million of the Gloucester budget.
Realigning Resources

In 2012, the VERA Institute of Justice published its Realigning Justice Resources: A Review of Population and Spending Shifts in Prison and Community Corrections (Subramanian & Tublitz). While the report focused on prisons and community corrections, three specific areas of interest were relevant to the jail discussion, including:

- Crime rates in the county – what are they? What are the trends? What have they been historically? This information is important in determining the need for beds in the jail on an ongoing basis. Use of mapping and data analysis can assist in identifying these areas and work to predicting future needs.
- How does probation and parole fit into the regionalization/consolidation design? What would the impacts be and is it feasible?
- Must consider all costs related to a transition, including but not limited to, healthcare, mental health and programs, food, sundries, laundry, maintenance, utilities, etc.

A Review of Common Themes

Based on the above review of the literature, several common themes emerge from the discussion. The overarching theme reiterates Benjamin and Simons’ (2009) work in New York with the idea of paradigm shift in thinking on a county scale to a regional scale. The Maine Municipal Association (2015) may have stated it concisely in their comment that attempts to regionalize allow for an “Increased coordinated, non-silo management of the jail/correctional system.” It is important to remember the regionalization may not be appropriate for every situation. The direction chosen, however, must be predicated on data gathering and analysis in the five main themes as discussed in the previous sections. The graphic that follows on the next page summarizes the themes and the major considerations of each.
# Paradigm Shift in Thinking

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cost Savings:</th>
<th>Other Agency Impacts</th>
<th>Politics</th>
<th>Communities</th>
<th>Jail Capacities</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>* Primary components</td>
<td>* Personnel Management</td>
<td>* Political Climate</td>
<td>* Citizen Satisfaction</td>
<td>* Standards to maintain</td>
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<td>* Expenditures</td>
<td>* Flexibility with manpower</td>
<td>* Loss of Control</td>
<td>* Sense of Community (Loss/Maintained)</td>
<td>* Alternatives to Incarceration</td>
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<tr>
<td>* Economies of Scale</td>
<td>* Training &amp; Certification</td>
<td>* Distribution of Control</td>
<td>* Impact on economies of community</td>
<td>* Impact on and to probation and parole</td>
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<tr>
<td>* Purchasing</td>
<td>* Inmates</td>
<td>* Responsibilities</td>
<td></td>
<td>* Impact to the court system</td>
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<tr>
<td>* Real Costs</td>
<td>* Types of inmates &amp; Services available</td>
<td>* Collaboration &amp; Cooperation</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>* Costs to each jurisdiction</td>
<td>* Transportation</td>
<td>* Approval of Changes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>* Taxes</td>
<td>* Technology</td>
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Considerations for consolidation/regionalization analysis
Illinois State Commission on Criminal Justice and Sentencing Reform

In December 2015, the Illinois State Commission on Criminal Justice and Sentencing Reform (CJSR) published its Final Report: Part I. In their recommendations the CJSR identified that alternatives for shorter periods of incarceration should be considered by the Illinois Department of Corrections, inclusive of “keeping inmates in local jails for the balance of a sentence” with compensation (p. 21). This may have an impact on the potential for consolidation or regionalization depending on how this rule impacts local jurisdictions and their capacity.

National Institute of Corrections

For a number of years, the National Institute of Corrections (NIC) has worked to develop tools and guides to assist corrections planners in many facets of the correctional system. In 2009, the NIC published the Jail Capacity Planning Guide. The guide has been used by agencies as a tool to assist in jail planning and reorganizational efforts. The guide includes a number of resources including conducting a system assessment, a case-study guide for a sample county and specific steps to use for any agency, planning, and forecasting capacity. While not specific to answering the question for consolidation or regionalization, the tools included in Appendix B may play a role in identifying important issues related to jail capacities and decision-making.

It should be noted that the National Institute of Corrections will also supply technical assistance with regards to agencies considering consolidation or regionalization.

Recommendations for Moving Forward

In 2002 and 2009, the Office of New York State Comptroller issued research briefs on shared services’ best practices and tips for success. These ideas are relevant and should be considered prior to any consolidation decision. Tips included:

- Identify realistic opportunities and practical resources (Feasibility analysis)
  - What is available in terms of services, equipment, personnel, impact on public safety, etc.?
  - What operations are currently being conducted? How are they being achieved?
  - What is the cost for the receiving agency? Anticipated costs for 2-5 years in the future? What are the total annual costs?
  - Idealism is fine but if the concepts are not practical and realistic, no one will support the idea of change
- Establish clear goals and objectives for the transition and ensure these are met through each step of the process
• Educate the public – building a culture of cooperation can be essential to support for the project. Listening to the community is important even if they disagree and have legitimate concerns about the transitions
• Look for “striking moments” such as retirements, attrition, etc. to make the potential transition so fewer people may be impacted
• Plan for roadblocks – people and events will impact the process, whether analyzing feasibility or moving forward with a plan; consider the potential problems that may be encountered throughout. For example, the National Association of Counties (NACO) discussed opposition may include not wanting to shift from the status quo in addition to confusion about tax levels and service levels (2012).
• Identify the potential for activities that will align the process – joint training, meetings, announcements, etc.
• Negotiate the agreement – ensure all goals and objectives are met and every contingency is considered prior to completion

Similarly, the National Conference of State Legislatures (2013) considered the impact that downsizing or consolidation may have on the economy of a community, especially if facilities close. Their research suggests the need to complete an impact analysis to identify highest operating costs and which facilities are the least efficient to run. They also discussed the potential for a direct portion of savings to go to community supervision programs which may assist in reducing needed bed space.

**Conclusion**

A number of considerations exist when determining which route a jurisdiction should take when deliberating a move to consolidation or regionalization. The information and ideas herein are a first step to analyzing the potential for restructuring jail operations. In order to move forward, data must be collected at all levels and in regards to each identified theme to determine the best next steps in identifying the most appropriate organizational arrangement.
### Quick Case Studies

<table>
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<th>Area, Reference</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
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| Atlanta Metro (Mellinger, Minton, & Driscoll, 2008) | - Several municipalities ended up privatizing  
- Regional initiatives through MOU protocols and operational protocols  
- Creation of regional jail – all municipalities bring inmates to the jail |
| Cuyahoga County & City of Cleveland, Ohio (FitzGerald, 2013) | - Public Safety Plan  
- Consolidation reduced taxpayer costs for jail services  
- Resulted in more expeditious and efficient booking, board, and care process  
- Reduced amount of time officers had to be at a jail for drop-off  
- Looking at regional booking centers or regional jails throughout the county  
- Considering expanding transportation unit and Cos while allowing municipalities to allocate law enforcement and dispatch while corrections focuses on jails |
| New York (Chamberlain, 2014) | - Consolidation to provide more efficient services to taxpayers  
- Sales tax revenue from other counties must be considered (how is revenue divided to support a consolidated system?)  
- Potential combined correctional/communication facilities  
- Any potential funding up front for building of a new facility (in this case, state funding) |
| Los Angeles, County (Hamai, 2015) | - Must consider reclassification of job positions |
| Davidson County Tennessee (Garrison, 2015) | - Community leaders shocked to hear of jail move  
- Council and other representatives were reportedly not included in the discussion process  
- Demographics of community must be considered – does it impact different community groups (i.e. transition from urban to suburban jail or vice versa)  
- Impacts to other business in the area must be considered (bail bonds stores; lawyers offices; these economies will be impacted)  
- Impacts on residential areas if moving facilities or building a new one |
References


Office of the New York State Comptroller, Division of Local Government and School Accountability. (2002). Intermunicipal cooperation and consolidation: Exploring


Case Study: Franklin County, Maine

In 2009, the state of Maine implemented a state jail consolidation plan wherein the state Corrections board took control of how the jails operated and where they were located. Within the plan, the state would send prisoners to the jails to relieve overcrowding and pay the counties for inmate housing and management. In June 2009, the Franklin County Detention Center shifted from being a full-time jail to a 72-hour holding facility until offenders obtained bail or were arraigned and then were to be transferred to another facility (generally 30 - 60 miles away). Sometimes the other county(ies) would refuse inmates due to lack of state funding. Challenges existed in the transition for several years, including increasing expenses locally, longer travel times to interview jail inmates, time spent accessing inmates, locating inmates, and covering jail shifts due to reduced staff. The work-release program was also cut, leaving more budgetary issues related to jobs offenders were doing in exchange for earlier release and increasing community ties at the time of reentry. Other programs were also negatively impacted such as inmates being able to earn GEDs while incarcerated.

In this situation the counties were not at odds with each other over the consolidation issues, the county and the state relationship had deteriorated. While the offenders were shipped to other counties to save money, the county itself was still required to appropriate the same money each year ($1.6 million with $600,000 sent to the state system for other county jails) and that money did not necessarily go to the county serving Franklin County’s inmates.

The state of Maine began to rethink the jail consolidation plan and included representatives from the National Institute of Corrections (NIC) in a strategic plan to fix the system. Local and state representatives from law enforcement, local and state government, and other stakeholders met and became a part of the conversation about the future of jails in the state of Maine and in Franklin County.

After much debate and a number of issues between Maine government and the governor, the jail consolidation plans were being reconsidered. In April 2015, Franklin County was reissued its jail license by the Department of Corrections and began full operations for 39 inmates (22 housed in another county and 17 beds available for more local inmates or to help overcrowding of other county facilities). Challenges in this situation, however, still had some negative implications for other counties including jails that had no place to house their inmates if the consolidation plan was to be overturned and overcrowding. The Franklin County Jail also had to hire or rehire staff to be in compliance with standards but had to make sure funding was in place prior to being fully staffed. Franklin County also lost approximately $315,000 in money it had paid into the state system that was never returned.

In June 2015, the state of Maine repealed the jail consolidation law returning control of county jails to the counties. Maine is unique in that portions of its money for jails are funded through the state and the county. Emergency funding was required for five counties and disbursement of funds was slow in coming.

In November 2015, Franklin County Sheriff Scott Nichols discussed the success in reopening the jail for the previous six months. One of the major challenges of the
consolidation that has since been resolved with the re-opening was travel for family of those inmates housed a distance from Franklin County. Programs have also been reinstated including self-help, education, religious, and crisis management. Substance abuse treatment is also offered through volunteers. The community is also happy to have its work release program back in place.

References:


