

COLUMBIA COUNTY
EXPLANATORY STATEMENT FOR COUNTY VOTERS' PAMPHLET

Ballot Title Caption: Columbia County Jail Operating Tax Levy

Measure Number (if known):

Word Total (500 Max): 462

Statement

In 1998, county voters approved a bond levy to construct a new Jail. The bond to build the new Jail was repaid in 2018. Property taxes collected to pay the bond are no longer being collected. The Jail is now 23 years old. Until 2014, Jail operations were primarily funded by the County General Fund and Jail bed rentals. However, by 2012, Jail operations became difficult to fund due to several years of decreases in the County's General Fund due to loss in federal timber funding. From 2012 to 2014, the County reduced the number of adults in custody (AICs) housed at the jail to lower operating expenses. The County force-released hundreds of AICs annually: 582 AICs were released in 2012, 791 in 2013, and 748 in 2014. Jail operations became unsustainable in 2014 and full closure of the Jail was planned. However, in 2014 voters approved a three-year Jail operating tax levy of \$0.5797 per \$1,000 of assessed property value, allowing the County to keep the Jail open. The tax levy was renewed by voters in 2017 and 2020. The tax levy will expire in 2024. Since passing this tax levy in 2014, the County has not force-release AICs. In 2023, the County booked 2,392 AICs into the Jail.

Since 2019, the Jail has experienced steady growth in operational costs, including significant increases in medical and mental health costs (\$634,278 in FY 19-20 to \$1,500,000 in FY 24-25) and food service costs (\$372,650 in FY 19-20 to \$524,001 in FY 24-25). In addition, Jail bed rental revenue decreased substantially from 2020-2022 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. During this period the County used reserve funds to bridge budget deficits and reserves are now depleted.

Income streams for the Jail include revenue from the General Fund, bed rentals to outside agencies, and Jail Operating taxes. The Board of County Commissioners has resolved to contribute 1 million dollars annually for Jail Operations. The County has also renegotiated bed rental per-diem rates from \$92 to \$127 per night to reduce the need for taxes. The County is proposing a Jail Operating tax levy at \$0.79 per \$1,000 of assessed property value for four years to bridge the remaining gap for full operation of the Jail through FY2028.

The tax levy will contribute to constitutionally required care for inmates, including food, clothing, health care, corrections deputies, and other corrections staff, in addition to facility maintenance and deferred capital projects, such as a roof replacement. The use of operating funds will continue to be monitored by a citizen committee established by the County (the "JOCAC"). In addition, the County will annually audit the use of tax levy funds for jail operations.

A property owner with an assessed value of \$100,000 would pay \$79.00 annually for four years.

Person responsible for the content of the Explanatory Statement:

Casey Garrett

(Name: TYPED)

X



(Name: SIGNED)

Columbia County Board of County Commissioners, Chair

Position

8/14/24

Date signed

Instructions

- The explanatory statement shall be typed.
- Word total: not to exceed 500 words.
- Signature: signed by the person responsible for the content of statement and to include the name of the governing body that person represents.
- Deadline: The statement filing deadline is the same deadline date as that of filing the Notice of Measure election (5pm)
- Note: The county clerk shall reject any referred measure submitted without an explanatory statement