



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **Graves County Jail and Inmate Housing Update**

Graves County, KY- The Graves County Fiscal Court would like to update the citizens of Graves County on the process of funding a jail, inmate housing, inmate transport, and possible short-term and long-term solutions. First and foremost, we would like to express our appreciation for Jailer Kelli Elliott since taking office. Jailer Elliott and her staff have worked tirelessly to keep the inmates secure and the citizens of Graves County safe.

To put it simply, needing a jail and funding a jail, are two very different things. Throughout the Commonwealth, jails are consistently the biggest strain on county budgets with only two county jails statewide showing profitability. This is by no means a new issue. This trend continues to increase and necessitates the need for jail and incarceration reform. Much of that is beyond the control of Kentucky counties as they are statutorily obligated to pay for inmates arrested in their county.

The price tag for a new jail is \$24,000,000 to \$50,000,000 depending on size. The previous Graves County Jail had 64 beds at the time it was built (current requirement is 150 beds) and was consistently fully occupied. Inmates from Graves County were routinely housed in nearby counties paid for by Graves County taxpayers.

After the December 10, 2021 tornado, all county inmates went to other county jails, some of which were on the other side of the state. During this time, the county inmate population soared to over 250 due to many factors, one factor was the lack of a court facility to process offenders. Unfortunately, this occurred post-Covid which made processing more difficult. After county inmates are sentenced, they become state inmates and are no longer paid for by the county. So, as Graves County lost their court facilities, cases were not processed, which increased the inmate count. The inmate count has since trended down now to an average of 169 in 2024-25. With fewer county inmates, a couple things have changed. Inmates are now housed closer to Graves County and General Fund transfers to cover the jails budget shortfalls are slightly reduced.

As mentioned above, the cost for a new jail is enormous. Not only is Graves County not able to bond tens of millions of dollars to build a new jail, the Graves County Fiscal Court does not believe it is wise or responsible to pass that cost along to taxpayers. We believe that the low tax environment of our county is an asset and do not want to burden the taxpayers with generational debt. Additionally, the insurance money from the jail and FEMA funds would make little impact on the cost of a new facility.

With the county funding a new jail not being a possibility, what options do we have? Currently, our best hope of getting a new jail resides with the state of Kentucky. HB 727 was filed by Rep. Holloway this session to allocate funding to Graves County for rebuilding a jail. Unfortunately, that bill was unsuccessful. Discussions involving a regional jail with adjoining counties is also a possibility and has received interest from state leadership. Both possibilities will now have to wait until the 2026 General Session which is a budget year.

In the short-term, action is being taken by the Graves County Fiscal Court and Jail. As county inmate populations continue to decline, the annual loss compared to pre-tornado levels is narrowing, making the burden less on taxpayers. First, housing our inmates closer to home makes it easier and safer for deputies transporting and additionally saves on fuel and vehicle maintenance costs. Housing agreements and contracts are currently being discussed with nearby counties and their respective Jailers. We are hopeful that this will not only ease the strain on the budget, but also provide safer transfer for jail deputies. Second, establishing a Jail Operations Center will provide much needed support not only to our jail staff, but also to the Circuit and District Court System. This JOC will house offices, cells and additional space not currently available. By adding this building, individuals who are arrested on nights and weekends will be able to be housed in Graves County and not transported until day shift. When inmates are due in court, they will be temporarily housed in the JOC prior to their court date making daily transport less frequent.

Both of these initiatives are currently in progress. While rebuilding a jail is by no means a guarantee, we remain hopeful that funds will be allocated by the state. If the funds are not allocated, these two initiatives will minimize General Fund monies used to subsidize the jail. The Graves County Fiscal Court will continue to be responsible monitoring the tax dollars of the citizens. As always, if you have any comments, questions, or concerns, please reach out to a member of the Graves County Fiscal Court.

Judge/Executive Jesse Perry  
Commissioner Bubba Winfrey  
Commissioner Tyler Goodman  
Commissioner Todd Hayden