



Senate Office of Policy and Legislative Analysis

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2024 Senate Study Committee Meeting Summary

DRAFT SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE SENATE PUBLIC SAFETY SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE FULTON COUNTY JAIL

Committee Members

Senator Randy Robertson, Chairman
District 29

Senator John Albers
District 56

Senator Sonya Halpern
District 39

Senator Brian Strickland
District 17

Senator Chuck Payne
District 54

Senator Tim Bearden
District 30

SUBCOMMITTEE CREATION, FOCUS, AND DUTIES

The Fulton County Jail Subcommittee was created as a subcommittee of the Senate Committee on Public Safety, chaired by Senator John Albers of the 56th. The Subcommittee was tasked with reviewing the Fulton County Jail.

Senator Randy Robertson of the 29th served as Chair. The other Senate members were Senators John Albers of the 56th, Sonya Halpern of the 39th, Brian Strickland of the 17th, Chuck Payne of the 54th, and Tim Bearden of the 30th.

The subcommittee met seven times beginning in 2023 through 2024. The first meeting was held on November 2, 2023, it was an introductory meeting that discussed the purpose and plans for this Subcommittee. Meeting two was held on December 14, 2023, it focused on the population breakdown of the Fulton County Jail System.

Meeting three was held on January 24, 2024, it focused on the District Attorney's Office and their budget and personnel numbers. Meeting four was held on February 14, 2024, which covered how judicial procedures impact the Fulton County Jail system and the judiciary process including the court system's procedures.

Meeting five was held on April 29, 2024, it focused on the administration of the courts, the Public Defender's Office, and healthcare within the jail system. Additionally, this meeting covered the process utilized by judicial circuits that are short staffed when they apply to expand their circuit. Moreover, the meeting's presenters explained the issues they face when short staffed and provided insights into possible solution to improve their efficiency.

Meeting six was held on May 7, 2024, it provided a detailed overview of the various funding areas, as well as, information regarding staffing needs for the Fulton County Sheriff's Office.

Meeting seven was held on May 10, 2024, which consisted of public testimony related to the findings and reflections from the previous Subcommittee meetings.

DRAFT FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based upon on the testimony, research presented, and information received, the Fulton County Jail Subcommittee recommends that:

1. The Fulton County Commission oversee all tax money allocated for the construction of a new Fulton County Jail or for the renovation of existing facilities;
2. The City of Atlanta immediately transfer the Atlanta Detention Center to Fulton County to be used for addressing Fulton County needs for safer confinement of detainees awaiting adjudication of criminal cases;
3. Fulton County partner with the Georgia Sheriff's Association and employ a third-party jail expert to oversee any jail construction, renovation, or consolidation;
4. The Fulton County Commission employ a maintenance team of skilled plumbers, electricians, HVAC technicians, and general upkeep experts that are assigned solely to the Fulton County Jail;
5. The Fulton County Commission establish a Fulton County Jail Advisory Board that would consist of individuals representing the Fulton County Commission, Fulton County Sheriff's Office, Fulton County District Attorney's Office, Fulton County Clerk of Courts, and the Fulton County Superior Court;
6. The Fulton County Commission establish policies and procedures that apply to any organization wishing to offer program services inside the criminal justice system within Fulton County. These policies must include a verification of tax status, a monthly auditing tool, and a breakdown of how taxpayer's money is allocated within the non-profit;
7. The Fulton County Commission establish a taskforce to identify any duplication of services, technology, and staffing within the Fulton County criminal justice system which ought to include any services provided by the Fulton County Sheriff's Office and the Atlanta Police Department.
8. All natural and unnatural deaths that occur inside of the Fulton County Jail be reported and investigated in the same manner as any death that occurs within Fulton County;
9. All Fulton County Superior Court Judges carry full dockets;
10. The Fulton County Clerk of Superior Court establish policies and procedures that track all felony cases from "arrest to adjudication" that can generate monthly reports to be viewed by all agencies within the Fulton County criminal justice system along with elected members of the Fulton County Commission;

11. The Fulton County District Attorney's Office and the Office of the Public Defender establish policies and procedures that allow for all non-violent and non-sexual offenses to be expedited within the Fulton County Judicial Circuit;
12. The Atlanta Police Department provide all evidence gathered in felony cases submitted to the Fulton County District Attorney's Office for prosecution without the requirement of an Open Records Request; and
13. The Fulton County Sheriff's Office and the Fulton County District Attorney's Office establish policies and procedures related to Request for Proposals (RFP) that include involving the Fulton County Finance Department as advisors in selecting contractors for special needs and services not specifically provided for or requested in their annual budgets.
14. The public & private relationship between the County Commissioner and Sheriff has been tenuous, unprofessional, and not the conduct the citizens should expect. Weekly professional meetings should take place to improve the relationship, trust, and spirit of teamwork to solve problems.
15. The County Commission should work with the Sheriff to benchmark best practices and industry standards to create and pass a transparent and responsible budget. Once passed, provide oversight and not micromanage of the budget or operations of the Sheriff.
16. The current workload of the Atlanta Circuit is not completely reported with Superior Court Judges delegating duties to other "courts of inquiry" or Senior Superior Court Judges. This practice should show the courts actual performance. An audit of the Court and best practices should be implemented from a people, process, and technology perspective.
17. The Fulton DA should conduct an audit from a third-party expert to streamline people, process, and outdated technology to expedite the process with the courts to adjudicate cases.