

Testimony
To the
House Political Subdivisions Committee
On
HB 1213

Good afternoon, Chairman Longmuir and members of the committee. My name is Kristi Brintnell, and I am the Chair of the Walsh County Commission.

I am here today to testify on behalf of the Walsh County Commissioners in strong support of HB1213.

Our county needs to build a new jail. The DOCR is only allowing our current jail to remain open for now due to the fact we are proceeding with plans to build a new jail. The burden of this massive expense will be on the shoulders of our taxpayers. At a time when the trend is to reduce property taxes, Walsh County Commissioners will have to ask our taxpayers to vote for an increase to property taxes to pay for a jail.

One of the main barriers to constructing a new jail is to obtain a solid source of funding. I am a member of the Walsh County Jail Finance Committee, and it is a challenge to even find necessary funding sources. One source of funding we can utilize is the Infrastructure Loan Fund established by the legislature. However, the maximum amount that can be borrowed through this fund is \$20 Million. Unfortunately, that is only on the basis that those funds are still available at the time the funding is requested. Our finance committee was informed that the funds in this infrastructure loan pool of money is on a 'first come, first serve' basis.

The cost of our 48 bed jail is \$42 Million. The cost to build is nearly inconceivable but the more important question is, what is the cost to NOT build? Law and Order and Safety is of the utmost importance in our communities. As elected officials, it is our responsibility to ensure we have the infrastructure to make sure we can provide this to our citizens. Without a solid funding source, it is nearly impossible to strategically put together the necessary funding to build a jail since the cost is so high.

We have grappled with the cost to build a new jail and how to proceed without a solid source of funding. That is why we strongly support HB 1213. To know up front that a county could have access to a \$40 Million dollar infrastructure loan would be invaluable as a county could then have the peace of mind knowing the necessary funds would be available.

Investing in jails is not only a necessity, but also simply the right thing to do. It will provide safe and secure confinement for inmates, and it will restore safety to our communities at a time when our current jails have exceeded their lifespan and space requirements. This is an investment in our communities and in a more sustainable justice system.

On behalf of the Walsh County Commission, I urge you to support HB 1213 and ensure counties have the resources they need to fund the cost to construct jails and provide safety to our communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and I would be happy to answer any questions.