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The District of Columbia's New Detention
Center: Careful Planning Essential for
Adequate Addition

General Accounting Office, Washington, D C

13 Jun 77

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*REPORT OF THE
COMPTROLLER GENERAL
OF THE UNITED STATES*

The District Of Columbia's
New Detention Center:
Careful Planning Essential
For Adequate Addition

The new District of Columbia detention center was constructed at an estimated cost of \$30.5 million and on schedule. However, its 960 cells are insufficient to house the District's detention population.

Detention population growth has exceeded projections and thereby precludes the closure of the older District jail and women's detention center.

At a cost of approximately \$12 million, the District plans to add 480 cells, which may not be adequate.

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JUNE 13, 1977



COMPTROLLER GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

B-118638

Chairman, Subcommittee on
District of Columbia
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Chairman, Subcommittee on
District of Columbia
Committee on Appropriations
House of Representatives

This report describes the justification, cost, schedule, and adequacy of the District of Columbia's new detention center.

This project was selected for specific review as part of our overall review of major acquisitions from appropriated funds.

We made our review pursuant to the Budget and Accounting Act, 1921 (31 U.S.C. 53), and the Accounting and Auditing Act of 1950 (31 U.S.C. 67).

We are sending copies of this report to the Director, Office of Management and Budget; and to the Mayor, District of Columbia.

James B. Stacks

Comptroller General
of the United States

REPORT OF THE
COMPTROLLER GENERAL
OF THE UNITED STATES

THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA'S
NEW DETENTION CENTER:
CAREFUL PLANNING ESSENTIAL
FOR ADEQUATE ADDITION

D I G E S T

The District of Columbia has constructed a new detention center in Southeast Washington to replace an older jail and the women's detention center. The new center was needed to relieve the overcrowded conditions and other inadequacies at the existing facilities.

The new center, however, lacks enough cells to accommodate the detention population which was averaging over 1,100 a day in 1976, and thereby precludes the planned closing of the District jail and the women's detention center. Also, the new center does not include the planned diagnostic and classification services due to a shortage of space. (See p. 10.)

Original plans included accommodations for 1,520 people and diagnostic and classification services for the description, diagnosis, and placement of detainees in appropriate treatment and training programs. The Subcommittee on District of Columbia, Senate Committee on Appropriations, questioned the need for a facility with a capacity of more than 1,000 because only slightly more than 800 persons were being detained at that time. The District restudied the proposal in 1973 and concluded that a 960-cell facility should be built using an expandable modular design for an ultimate capacity of 1,440. The center was built within the \$30.5 million estimated cost and was completed in July 1976 as scheduled.

The District is planning to add 480 cells at an estimated cost of \$12 to \$13 million. (See p. 6.) GAO believes the 480-cell addition to the detention center will be inadequate to accommodate peak detention population projections and will not provide space for the diagnostic and classification services.

The District has questioned the use of peak population projections for planning purposes. GAO believes that the District should plan for peak rather than average detention populations because the average frequently would be exceeded, thus creating a problem of accommodating excess detainees. The District is under a court order prohibiting overcrowding in the detention facilities. At the same time, the detention facilities must accommodate all persons assigned there by the courts.

The detention population for the period October 1, 1976, to May 15, 1977, averaged 1,461 persons; the population may reach a peak of 1,581 by 1980 according to a 1971 consultant's study. The excess detainees are now being held in the old jail and the women's detention center, but the District wants to take both of these out of detention service. When these two facilities are closed, the detainees will have to be accommodated in the detention center and in the planned addition.

GAO is, therefore, recommending that the District use all pertinent factors to determine space requirements in planning for the addition to the detention center including

- projections of peak daily detention populations, and
- provision of space for diagnostic and classification services.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The District of Columbia's new detention center for housing male and female detainees was constructed on a 3.7-acre site adjacent to an older District jail and the District of Columbia General Hospital in Southeast Washington, D.C. The center was intended to replace the older jail and the women's detention center located in Northwest Washington, D.C.

The architect-engineer for the project was a joint venture of Thalheimer and Weitz, Brown and Wright, and McDonald and Williams. The new detention center was constructed by the George Hyman Construction Company under contract with the D.C. Department of General Services for the D.C. Department of Corrections. The Department of General Services has responsibility for contracting for the District. The Department of Corrections administers the District's detention facilities and is responsible for developing and recommending major correctional policies and programs for the District.

BACKGROUND

In 1875 the District jail was opened at 19th Street and B Street (now Independence Avenue) SE., Washington, D.C. The four-story complex has been expanded and renovated through the years. It now contains two maximum security and two medium security cell blocks and a two-story dormitory to house male offenders. Female offenders were moved from this facility in 1967 to a separate women's detention center on North Capitol Street. The jail and the women's detention center house people awaiting court action.

JUSTIFICATION

The new detention center was justified primarily because the 100-year-old jail was overcrowded and inadequate. The American Correctional Association reported in June 1966 that the physical structure of the jail was such that adequate space was not available for the average daily detention population.

The President's Commission on Crime in the District of Columbia also stated in its December 1966 report that a new facility was needed. It added that considering (1) the age of the jail, (2) the poor physical plan which made supervision of the housing units difficult even with an adequate

staff, (3) increased maintenance costs, and (4) the expenditures that needed to be made for new housing and storage facilities to accommodate an ever rising population, planning should be started for a new jail.

In fiscal year 1970, the Congress approved funds for a preliminary planning study of a new detention center. The year-long survey analyzed present and projected numbers of inmates, programs associated with advanced correctional concepts, accelerated changes in the District's criminal justice agencies and their impact on the proposed facilities, and the problems of finding sites for new facilities. The survey report in December 1971 recognized the need for new detention facilities in the District and recommended that a main detention center capable of housing 1,520 people be constructed.

The 1,520-cell detention center was proposed to the Congress, but in February 1973 the Subcommittee on District of Columbia, Senate Committee on Appropriations urged the District to reconsider whether it was necessary to construct a detention facility of this size. Considering that slightly more than 800 persons were being detained at that time, the Subcommittee questioned the need to build a facility with a capacity of more than 1,000 persons. The District restudied its detention needs and concluded in March 1973 that a 960-cell facility should be built.

DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT

The detention center consists of two basic building modules: (1) two housing or cellblock modules of 102,600 square feet each and (2) one auxiliary module of 128,000 square feet. The modules are surrounded by an 8-foot perimeter wall. Outdoor courtyards are provided for the detainees, and parking spaces for 70 vehicles are provided for employees and visitors.

Housing modules

The housing modules contain 12 two-level cellblocks, each cellblock containing 80 individual cells, for a total capacity of 960 persons. This arrangement allows for category grouping.

Each cellblock is basically self-contained and has four dayrooms, a dining room, a sick-call room, and a recreation room with ceiling heights sufficient for basketball and similar activities. Canteen and library services are brought to the cellblocks by carts. The cells provide each

person with 70 square feet, compared to a minimum of 50 square feet set by the American Correctional Association. At least two-thirds of the cells have windows; all have toilet facilities.

Auxiliary module

An auxiliary module connected to the housing modules provides support services which include

- personal services, such as mail and medical services (a 24-bed infirmary and clinic area);
- ancillary services, such as a law library, laundry, and intake processing area;
- education services, such as programs designed for short-term detainees, including academic subjects as well as those aimed at maintaining community ties;
- visiting services that are decentralized to each floor; there is no physical contact with visitors, but special private booths are provided for lawyers' visits; and
- support services, such as administrative records and data processing, and maintenance services.

The \$39.1-million cost estimate presented to the Congress during the fiscal year 1973 appropriation hearings in February 1972 for the 1,520-cell detention center, was based on a December 1971 consultant's report. At the urging of the Subcommittee on District of Columbia, Senate Committee on Appropriations, the District conducted a study reevaluating the need for the 1,520 cells and concluded in March 1973 that only 960 cells would be required at a revised estimated project cost of \$34.8 million. The reduction in cells reduced the estimated cost by \$3.3 million, and another \$1 million was saved by reducing the estimated cost of equipment for the facility. Although the cellblock housing would be built for a capacity of 960 cells, it could be expanded to a capacity of 1,200 or 1,440 cells because of the flexibility of its modular design.

During the fiscal year 1974 appropriation hearings in May 1973, the District estimated that the cost of the detention center would be reduced from \$34.8 million to \$32.5 million. The \$2.3 million reduction was due to several factors:

- An improved cost estimate made by the architect when the design was about half complete reduced the estimated cost by \$1.7 million.
- When security was reduced from 100 percent maximum to 50 percent maximum and 50 percent medium, the cost for cell doors and locking mechanisms was reduced by \$0.4 million.
- Less laundry, kitchen, and dining equipment was needed when the capacity was reduced from 1,520 to 960 persons. This reduced the estimated cost by \$0.1 million.
- The elimination of caissons for future expansion saved \$0.1 million.

The Congress appropriated funds to complete the project except for \$2.4 million for equipment which would be requested later.

In December 1975 the District reduced the estimated cost of the project to \$30.5 million. The \$2 million reduction resulted from a decrease in the appropriation request for equipment from \$2.4 million to \$0.4 million. The 1973 equipment estimate had not been updated until this appropriation request was prepared. The prefabricated cells in the jail contained many items of equipment--such as beds--that were originally to be procured under the equipment appropriation.

EXPANSION OF THE DETENTION CENTER

The Department of Corrections is planning to construct an additional 480-cell module to the detention center which will provide for a capacity of 1,440 people. The Department, after analysis, concluded that it would be more economical to expand the detention center than renovate the jail to provide 480 cells.

The Department of General Services has drafted a scope of work, and a budget request to the Congress is being considered. The Department of General Services estimates that the addition of the 480-cell module will cost about \$12 to \$13 million. This estimate includes about \$7.5 million for building and startup costs, removing precast paneling from the existing facility, constructing caissons, and working in a security area; \$3 million is included for inflation; \$1 million, for construction services; and \$0.5 million, for contingencies.

SCHEDULE

When the Congress first appropriated construction funds in 1973, the detention center was scheduled for completion in mid-1976. Construction began in September 1973 with a contractual completion date of July 29, 1976. Although the general contractor experienced more than 6 months of trade strikes in the aggregate, the project was completed on schedule. The new detention center was officially opened on March 29, 1976, with partial occupancy beginning in April and full occupancy at the conclusion of construction on July 16, 1976.

The Department of General Services told us that the schedule for construction of the additional 480 cells would entail 1 year for design and 2 years for construction if the appropriation is granted. It plans to award contracts by June 30, 1977, which would place the completion date in 1980.

CHAPTER 3

LACK OF ADEQUATE CAPACITY

AT NEW DETENTION CENTER

The new detention center does not have space to house the total detention population of the District nor will it provide space originally planned for diagnostic and classification services. When the new detention center was officially opened in March 29, 1976, the detention population in the jail and the female detention center exceeded the space available in the new center by 30 percent.

ORIGINAL PLAN

Originally, the District's new detention center was to house 1,520 detainees. Once completed, a facility of this size would allow closure of the District's 100-year-old jail and the women's detention center, both of which were overcrowded and inadequate. In addition to consolidating all detainees, the original plan provided space for diagnostic and classification services at the facility. The diagnostic and classification services entail the description, diagnosis, and placement of convicted persons in appropriate treatment and training programs. The location of diagnostic and classification services in the detention center was desirable because, according to a Department of Corrections official, this service should ideally be completed before assigning convicted persons to appropriate treatment and training programs. This was also consistent with the 1966 recommendation of the President's Commission on Crime.

The 1,520-population estimate was based on projections developed by a 1971 consultant's report. The consultant-projected peak daily populations are shown in the following table. (See next page.)

Projected Peak Detention Population from
1975 to 1995, District of Columbia Detention Center

<u>Men</u>	<u>1975</u>	<u>1980</u>	<u>1985</u>	<u>1990</u>	<u>1995</u>
Orientation (note a)	123	126	119	112	108
Pretrial (note b)	<u>602</u>	<u>705</u>	<u>710</u>	<u>681</u>	<u>682</u>
Total	<u>725</u>	<u>831</u>	<u>829</u>	<u>793</u>	<u>790</u>
Postconviction:					
Diagnosis and classification	351	389	376	351	343
Probation workup	197	191	184	176	172
Awaiting appellate review	<u>74</u>	<u>97</u>	<u>97</u>	<u>94</u>	<u>95</u>
Total	<u>622</u>	<u>677</u>	<u>657</u>	<u>621</u>	<u>610</u>
Total (men)	<u>1,347</u>	<u>1,508</u>	<u>1,486</u>	<u>1,414</u>	<u>1,400</u>
<u>Women</u>					
Orientation	9	6	5	5	5
Pretrial	38	34	31	29	28
Postconviction	<u>42</u>	<u>33</u>	<u>29</u>	<u>28</u>	<u>27</u>
Total (women)	<u>89</u>	<u>73</u>	<u>65</u>	<u>62</u>	<u>60</u>
Total (men and women)	<u>1,436</u>	<u>1,581</u>	<u>1,551</u>	<u>1,476</u>	<u>1,460</u>

a/Orientation includes the 72-hour period immediately following initial hearing and commitment to the detention center.

b/Pretrial includes a 3% additional contingency factor to allow for those cases which may experience unusual and excessive delays or contingencies such as management and administrative emergencies.

The 1975 projected peak of 1,436 was a straight-line projection of major index crimes based on past crime rates and population projections used by the District. The peak detention population projections do not include emergency or short-term buildups. This straight-line extrapolation was adjusted based on expected changes in crime.

REDUCTION OF CENTER TO 960 CELLS

Because of large fluctuations in the daily population at the old jail, the Department of Corrections undertook a study during the latter part of fiscal year 1973 to develop an updated recommendation on capacity for the new detention center. The study was completed in February 1973 and projected a 1975 estimated population for both a low and high condition of 830 and 1,006, respectively. The study report recommended the construction of a 960-cell facility based on (1) 1972 arrest data, (2) the percentage of those arrested that were detained, and (3) the approximate duration of their detention. The result was a projection of an average daily detention population. Relying on the study, the District's Office of Criminal Justice Plans and Analysis made a final projection which was used in deciding in March 1973 to build only a 960-cell facility.

The Director of the Department of Corrections told us that projecting accurate detention population was virtually impossible. The detention population is affected by factors, such as the number of arrests made by the police, the amount of bail set by the courts, the days elapsed between arrest and trial, and the days elapsed between trial and sentencing. Reduction of these factors will tend to reduce the detention population. For example, reducing the average time from arrest to trial from 15 weeks to 8 weeks would have reduced the fiscal year 1976 average daily detention population from 1,151 to 614 persons.

These factors could be affected by such variables as changes in staffpower in the courts or police department, intensity of effort by police to make arrests, extent of pretrial releases by the court, changes in bail policies in the courts, speed of attorneys in preparing to prosecute and defend cases, and timeliness of handling cases by the courts.

CONSEQUENCES OF 960-CELL JAIL

When the new detention center was officially opened on March 29, 1976, the detention population in the jail and the women's detention center exceeded the space available in the new center. The average daily detention population in fiscal year 1976 was 1,151 (1,043 males and 108 females). The fiscal year 1977 population to May 15th averaged 1,461.

The following originally planned programs are not included because the present detention population exceeds the detention center's capacity.

First, the Corrections Department had intended to raze the old jail and to convert the women's detention center to a halfway house. Now, the Corrections Department plans to continue operating two of the four cellblocks and the dormitory in the jail to meet the need for additional cells. The other two cellblocks were vacated by court order due to structural damage. The court order restricted the jail's capacity to 577 after vacating the two cellblocks. If the male detention population rises to a total exceeding 1,457 (880 at the detention center and 577 at the jail), additional space will be required to house the excess population in order to remain in compliance with the court order.

If the female detention population (average for fiscal year 1976 was 108) remains in excess of 80, one cellblock in the new detention center will be used for women; and the women's detention center, with a capacity of 66, will remain open for the overflow until the capacity of the new detention center is increased. At that time the women's detention center will be closed and two cellblocks in the new detention center will be reserved for females.

Therefore, instead of being able to consolidate all detainees to one new centralized facility, three locations are now required.

Second, the diagnostic and classification services for assigning convicted persons to appropriate treatment and training programs will not be included in the new detention center as originally planned, although the Congress was informed that these services were the most desirable element in the new center.

An official of the Corrections Department informed us that the correctional system lacked the needed personnel, finances, and physical design to initiate effective diagnostic and classification services at any of its adult correctional facilities. He added that the provision of these services at the detention center might reduce adult institutional problems attributable to inadequacies in diagnostic and classification services from an estimated 50 percent to an estimated 5 percent.

Because of the detention center's space shortage, the Department of Corrections will not allow convicted people to remain at the detention center for the estimated 40-day period needed to conduct diagnostic and classification services.

CONCLUSIONS AND AGENCY COMMENTS

We believe the 480-cell addition to the detention center will be inadequate to accommodate peak detention population projections and will not provide space for the diagnostic and classification services.

The District has questioned the use of peak population projections for planning purposes. But we believe that the District should plan for peak rather than average detention populations because the average frequently would be exceeded, thus creating a problem of accommodating excess detainees. The District is under a court order prohibiting overcrowding in the detention facilities. At the same time, the detention facilities must accommodate all persons assigned there by the courts.

The detention population for the period October 1, 1976, to May 15, 1977, averaged 1,451 persons; the population may reach a peak of 1,581 by 1980 according to a 1971 consultant's study. The excess detainees are now being held in the old jail and the women's detention center, but the District wants to take both of these out of detention service. When these two facilities are closed, the detainees will have to be accommodated in the detention center and in the planned addition.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We are, therefore, recommending that the District use all pertinent factors to determine space requirements in planning for the addition to the detention center including

- projections of peak daily detention populations, and
- provision of space for the diagnostic and classification services.

CHAPTER 4

SCOPE OF REVIEW

Our review was directed primarily toward the cost, schedule, and adequacy of the new detention center facility.

Work was conducted in the Washington area between August 1975 and June 1976. We spoke with project officials in the D.C. Government's Departments of Corrections and General Services and various officials of the D.C. Court Systems, Executive Office of the Mayor, D.C. Office of Planning and Management, and the Federal Bureau of Prisons. In addition, we interviewed the project's architect-engineer and general contractors.

We reviewed project design, cost, schedule, and contractual documents; preliminary studies, legislation pertinent to the project; and correspondence between the project officials, the general contractors, and the architect-engineer.

The District's comments have been considered and are included in this report where appropriate. (See app. II.)

SCHEDULE OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA'S
AVERAGE DAILY DETENTION POPULATION,
AND THE CAPACITY OF DETENTION FACILITIES
BY FISCAL YEAR

Fiscal year	District jail		Women's Deten- tion center		New detention center		Total Popu- lation
	Capac- ity	Popu- lation	Capac- ity	Popu- lation	Capac- ity	Popula- tion	
1968	663	918	50	73	-	-	991
1969	663	961	50	80	-	-	1,041
1970	663	1,045	50	87	-	-	1,132
1971	663	1,050	50	100	-	-	1,150
1972	663	1,175	50	98	-	-	1,273
1973	663	808	50	83	-	-	891
1974	663	746	a/66	58	-	-	804
1975	b/618	857	66	60	-	-	917
1976	c/577	d/1,043	66	d/108	-	-	1,151
1976 ^t	577	494	66	86	960	893	1,473
1977 to mid-May	577	491	66	89	960	881	1,461

a/Addition of 16 rooms on 4th floor.

b/A library replaced a dormitory.

c/Library was reconverted to a dormitory of 91 spaces, provided 140 spaces by establishing a dormitory in recreation area, and lost 272 spaces in vacated cellblocks 1 and 2.

d/Includes men and women assigned to new detention center before it became fully operational.

t Fiscal year 1976 transition quarter, July 1, 1976, to September 30, 1976.



THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

WALTER E. WASHINGTON
MAYOR

WASHINGTON, D. C. 20004

Jan 25 1977

Mr. Victor L. Lowe, Director
General Government Division
U. S. General Accounting Office
Washington, D. C. 20548

Dear Mr. Lowe:

The District of Columbia has reviewed the General Accounting Office report "Acquisition of the District of Columbia's New Detention Center."

We wholeheartedly concur with the recommendation for the addition of the 480 units and are proceeding to request needed funding. They are needed now and for the foreseeable future. We believe that it will be more economical to provide this addition than to run two separate facilities. The District is also firmly committed to move the Diagnostic and Classification Unit to the Detention Center when facilities become adequate and severe population pressures no longer exist.

We do not disagree with the General Accounting Office's assessment of the problems the District faced in projecting Corrections populations. As we pointed out at the time, there are inherent difficulties in making long-term projections with relatively short-term data.

As the GAO stated, the decision to reduce the initial size of the new Detention Center was made in response to an expressed Congressional Committee desire that the size of the facility be reduced. We agreed to do so, however, only because of the modular design which permitted later expansion at the site. It should also be noted that the District did build the full central utility core as part of the original project, thereby facilitating subsequent expansion.

It is true that there are cost penalties implicit in the two-stage construction effort, but much of the increase is a product of continued inflation.

With respect to the projections, the General Accounting Office has rightly pointed out the difficulties of such forecasts. As was noted in 1973, such projections are the product of a great many, often unpredictable, variables and frequently suffer from outright unavailability of information. Such was the case with the 1973 study.

[See GAO note, p. 16.]

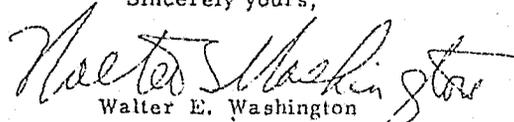
Another problem which can be identified is the usage of the term "peak" population. As indicated in the GAO Report, a range of between 830 and 1006 was furnished by the 1973 study. The District elected to rely on the lower figure. All factors at the time appeared to point toward this.

[See GAO note, p. 16.]

In hindsight, it is a simple matter to conclude that it would have been better to have built the full 1500 person facility at the outset. Doing so, however, ignores the context in which the 1973 decision was made. That decision reflected a fall off in the detention population that had already occurred. The current reversal of that earlier decision is in the context of a sustained reversal of that trend.

The original decision was made in good faith, reflecting the District's best judgment of its urgent needs. Since it has turned out that the District's projections were too low, it is indeed fortunate that a modular design was used, permitting us to go back to the original capacity with a second-stage construction program.

Sincerely yours,


Walter E. Washington
Mayor

GAO note: Deleted comments refer to material not included in this final report.

PRINCIPAL OFFICIALS
OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA GOVERNMENT
CONCERNED WITH ACTIVITIES
DISCUSSED IN THIS REPORT

	<u>Tenure of office</u>	
	<u>From</u>	<u>To</u>
MAYOR (note a): Walter E. Washington	Nov. 1967	Present
DIRECTOR, DEPARTMENT OF GENERAL SERVICES: Colonel Sam D. Starobin	June 1970	Present
DIRECTOR, DEPARTMENT OF CORREC- TIONS:		
Delbert C. Jackson	July 1973	Present
Delbert C. Jackson (acting)	Apr. 1973	July 1973
Kenneth L. Hardy	Jan. 1967	Mar. 1973

a/Position was entitled Commissioner until January 2, 1975

END