



## Administration

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### MEMO

TO: County Commission  
FROM: Robert W. Wilson  
Date: June 14, 2023  
Subject: Potential County Takeover of Inmate Nursing Services

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Fargo Cass Public Health (FCPH) has approached the County with a request for Cass County to take over inmate medical services in the Cass County Jail. FCPH – an office of Fargo City government – provides inmate medical services as well as public health services in unincorporated Cass County.

FCPH has previously discussed with the County its concerns about continuing in the inmate medical care role. The discussions have been cordial and collaborative, but FCPH has repeatedly indicated the volume and complexity of medical needs in the jail challenges the office's capacity and is beyond the traditional scope of a public health office.

Previously similar discussions ended with FCPH agreeing to continue providing the current level of care, but making clear they cannot provide additional nursing coverage or increase the number of staff. With the number of inmates in the jail continuing to increase and an increase in the complexity of inmate medical issues, the jail is at a position where additional nurse staffing resources will be needed soon. In addition to current needs, the addition of 196 new cells in the next two years will increase inmate medical needs. For these reasons it may be appropriate for Cass County to plan for assuming responsibility for inmate medical care in 2025.

County staff has begun researching the actions needed to assume inmate medical responsibilities. They include acquiring a medical records database, employee transition from City to Cass County employment, recruiting and supervision of medical staff, insurance and liability and internal budgeting vs. contracting.

I have reached out to Burleigh and Grand Forks Counties to understand how they provide inmate medical care. Burleigh County transitioned from Bismarck-Burleigh County Public Health to Burleigh County Detention Center nursing care about 10 years ago. A senior staffer at the detention center indicated recruiting and retaining employees is a significant challenge, but they believe inmates receive better care under the current structure. Inmate medical services at the Grand Forks County Correctional Center are provided by Grand Forks Public Health.

This item is scheduled for Commission discussion on June 19<sup>th</sup>. At that time, I will be seeking Commission direction if staff should continue preparing for a potential County take-over of inmate care.

An additional point of information – County and FCPH staff have discussed transitioning the Cass County Jail Nursing Supervisor and one other position from Exempt to Non-Exempt status due to the extended hours required of these positions. If that becomes a formal request, I have suggested that come initially to the County from FCPH because FCPH is the employer. Because it is a service provided to the County, I expect the cost of such a transition would be forwarded to – and require County approval.