



VICKI ZEMP BEHENNA
DISTRICT ATTORNEY

MYKEL FRY
FIRST ASSISTANT DISTRICT ATTORNEY

May 6, 2026

Timothy Kimrey
Chief of Administration
201 N. Shartel Ave.
Oklahoma City, OK 73102

Re: Transportation of detainees

Dear Chief Kimrey:

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to meet with you and your staff on Monday to express my concerns about the detention center voluntarily taking on the responsibility to transport detainees from the detention center to the courthouse. As I have stated publicly, I have significant concerns about the safety of detention officers, detainees, and the public if the detention center agrees to assume transportation responsibilities.

Presiding Judge Sheila Stinson, Chief Public Defender Brigitte Biffle and I met on Friday, May 1, 2026, to discuss what effect this decision will have on criminal proceedings in Oklahoma County. We identified a number of detention center operations that are not currently working efficiently due to the staffing levels at the detention center. There are concerns that if staff members are moved from their current duties to cover transportation, that will further exacerbate these inefficiencies. For example, defense lawyers must make appointments at the detention center to see their clients. (Lawyers meet with their clients to prepare for hearings, trial, or to convey plea offers.) Lawyers who have appointments to visit with their clients cannot get their clients timely moved by detention officers from pods to the attorney visitation rooms. Ms. Biffle explained that her lawyers have waited in excess of 40 minutes, even with an appointment, to see their client. If a lawyer has to see his/her client without an appointment, they can wait upwards of 1 hour to get into a visitation room.

Detainees, who have bonds posted for their release, or who have orders from the court authorizing their release, are currently waiting between 12 to 24 hours to be processed out of the detention center. These delays are attributable to the low staffing levels within the detention center. Once again if detention staff

are moved from booking and release areas of the detention center to transportation that will further increase the out-processing time of detainees.

As you know, Oklahoma County has robust diversion and treatment programs. We experienced delays in getting offender screenings done timely because there are not enough staff to escort the detainees to the provider for these screenings. So several months ago we started bringing those detainees, who might qualify for a treatment program, to the courthouse and a provider does the offender screen on the eleventh floor of the courthouse. Having offender screenings completed at the detention center, and within hours of their intake, would help us more quickly identify those detainees who would benefit from treatment. It would help stabilize those detainees experiencing psychosis.

Oklahoma County also has a pre-trial release program that is administered by TEEM. Before a detainee can be evaluated for release, we review the charges, the probable cause affidavit, NCICs, and TEEM completes an interview with the detainee to determine what conditions need to be set to ensure public safety and the person's appearance at all court proceedings. The detention center staff assists TEEM in those interviews. There are three (3) detention officers that go from floor to floor moving detainees from their cells to the Polycom so they can complete their interviews. TEEM would like to be able to do more interviews with detainees to assess their ability to be released, but if staff are moved from pre-trial services to transportation, that will immediately affect TEEM's ability to evaluate detainees for pre-trial release, thereby increasing the population at the detention center.

Finally, I have serious public safety concerns if the detention center assumes the responsibility to transport detainees. I am concerned that there are not enough detention center staff to move detainees safely. I am concerned that the staff are not properly trained on how to transport detainees and a one-month training period is not enough time to complete this training. In cases where there are multiple defendants, separation orders are obtained and provided to the Sheriff's office so that a cooperating co-defendant who is going to testify against his/her co-defendant(s) is not transported with the co-defendants. A gang member cannot be transported with rival gang members. These separation orders require the Sheriff to keep certain defendants separated during transport. The Sheriff's office is the agency that reviews those separation orders and determines which detainees can be placed in which vans. They also keep the defendants separated while they are on the 11th floor of the courthouse. This amount of coordination cannot be accomplished safely by detention officers who are not experienced in transporting detainees, or with these separation orders.

A decision to voluntarily move transportation responsibility from the Sheriff's office to the detention center should not be made lightly or quickly. Some detainees are extremely violent. Some have severe mental health issues making them uncooperative. Transporting detainees is not a routine logistical task. It is a large-scale security operation that requires trained and experienced personnel capable of maintaining order, preventing violence or escape, and ensuring the safety of all involved. It is my understanding that of the four counties, besides Oklahoma County, that have Jail Trusts - Comanche, Tulsa,

Logan and Pottawatomie – in each of those counties, the Sheriff is responsible for transporting detainees to and from the detention center to the courthouse.

Last year, my office filed 11,000 cases, which creates a substantial daily demand for transportation of detainees to and from the detention center to the courthouse. Any breakdown in staffing, coordination or security protocols creates a risk that can extend far beyond the walls of the courthouse. It is my hope that the detention center will focus on the duties it is solely responsible for, i.e., attorney/client visitation, processing release orders, and facilitating offender screens and pre-trial release interviews, before it voluntarily assumes responsibility for detainee transport.

Should you have questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Vicki Zemp Behenna', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Vicki Zemp Behenna
District Attorney
Oklahoma County

cc: Chairman Jim Holman