



Shelby County Sheriff's Office

Floyd Bonner, Jr., Sheriff

December 4, 2025

Honorable Mayor Lee Harris
Shelby County
160 N. Main, 11th Floor
Memphis, Tennessee 38103

RE: An Open Letter to Shelby County Mayor Lee Harris from Sheriff Floyd Bonner, Jr.

Dear Mayor Harris:

Once again, Mayor Harris, your lack of communication and engagement with the Shelby County Sheriff's Office has led you to provide misinformation to the community. As a former law professor, you should know that I am legally required to operate the Jail. Interestingly, you have suddenly decided to pay attention to the problems with the Jail after ignoring them for nearly 7 ½ years during both of your terms of Office.

Every year, the Tennessee Corrections Institute (TCI) sends you, by law, a required report on the Jail and Jail East. Every year since you have been in Office, the deteriorating condition of the facility has been underscored, and warnings about overcrowding have been issued. Every year, you did not pick up the phone to ask me what we were working on to solve the problems or how you could help.

Even though you did not ask, my Office continued working to solve problems. Repairs and upgrades were completed, vigorous efforts were made to recruit and hire additional personnel, analysis was conducted, and a report was submitted earlier this year outlining the need for a new Jail. You responded that a new jail was not needed. In the face of years of reports that the facility is overcrowded, you state that a bigger jail is not required. The current Jail is not designed for the number of people it houses.

The Jails are "owned" by the County. It is not surprising that you think it is fine to house people who have not been convicted of crimes in a dilapidated building where the plumbing and electrical systems are constantly breaking. The Shelby County Correctional Center ("Penal Farm"), under you and your administration, is probably in worse shape. What has TCI written to you about your facility?

I learned this week that you did not even know what TCI is or what it does. You only learned this because, you were required to sign off on my plan of action for



201 POPLAR AVENUE, 9TH FLOOR, MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE 38103



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overcrowding, which involves relocating inmates to other facilities and working with the State to pick up convicted prisoners. We are repairing/converting some other facilities to house our residents.

You delayed signing my plan because you were upset about the pending litigation over my funding. That delay could have had dire consequences.

Dire financial consequences have not deterred you from your Penal Farm. While the Jails receive \$41 per day to house convicted prisoners until the State picks them up, the State was paying the Penal Farm \$73 per day for prisoners locally sentenced to 1-6 years through June 30, 2025. All others were \$41. When the State offered to increase the payments to \$76 per day on July 1, 2025, you rejected it. Since July and at least through October 29, you have been receiving only \$41 per day for the 2,700 prisoners your website says you are housing, as the county is not under contract with the state. That is a daily loss of \$94,500, and you will have lost over \$17 million by the end of this year. Can Shelby County afford this?

Under my leadership, the Sheriff's Office offers the public a full view of what is happening at its facilities through the monthly Jail Report Card, available on our website.

Correction Center (Penal Farm) Calls

It should be noted that your Corrections Center houses prisoners convicted of lower-level felonies and misdemeanors, as opposed to the Jail, a pretrial facility, which must house those charged with violent felonies such as murder, kidnapping, and aggravated assault, because they are not convicted. I cannot turn arrestees away.

My Office is responsible for responding to calls for service at your facility at the Corrections Center. If there are no calls for service, then neither we nor the public have any knowledge of what occurs there because you do not disclose your incidents as we do.

In addition, there were the following calls between 2024 and the present:

2024 Incidents

Simple Assault	157
Aggravated Assault	15

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Criminal Assault	6
Arson	5
Vandalism/Felony	9
Bomb Threat	5
Vandalism/Misdemeanor	2
Memo: Access Device	1
Memo: Traffic SCSO	1
Memo:	134
Other Complaint	34

Total of 369 calls for service at the Correction Center

2025 Incidents

Simple Assault	106
Aggravated Assault	33
Memo	28
Other Offenses Not Listed	16
Vandalism/Felony	11
Arson	9
Other	6
Vandalism/Misdemeanor	6
Intimidation	3
Attempted Suicide	2
Bomb Threat	2
DOA/Unknown	2
Emergency Commitment	2
Accidental Injury	1
Escapee	1
Criminal Assault	5
Suicide	1

Total of 234 calls for service at the Correction Center, as well as 289 Ambulance calls.

In 2025, as listed above, there were four deaths reported. One death reportedly occurred from a stabbing, one was from a suicide, and two died in the hospital in connection with medical conditions.

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Quotes from you and your Office

In a recent interview, you said you find the deaths at 201 Poplar “really troubling.” Do you feel the same about the deaths at your Correction Center this year? What about the murder? While it was reported that the man was found “unresponsive,” the fact is that the prisoner was stabbed and died. The failure of your Office to provide the media with information about deaths led to a change in State law to force such reporting. As you know, my Office has always reported in-custody deaths—often over-reporting.

There is evidence that your employees have been charged with working with prisoners to bring in contraband. They have been accused of having relations with prisoners. The prisoners are assaulting each other. The prisoners are assaulting staff members. The prisoners are overdosing on drugs. The prisoners are smoking, and they are using cell phones, which is prohibited.

What is your plan for *those* troubling concerns?

An example of this was when one of your former Corrections officers was dismissed for consorting with prisoners and was later hired by my Office. Why? Because the Shelby County Government failed to provide that information to my Office during the hiring process. However, as soon as I was made aware, I personally fired that recruit in front of her classmates, letting everyone know that such behavior is not tolerated at the Sheriff's Office.

When my employees engage in such conduct, they are terminated and prosecuted if the DA agrees. I tell the community what has happened in the interest of transparency. What does your Office tell the community?

The only reason your corrections personnel are properly paid is because of the Shelby County Commission's intervention. Just as you didn't keep up your facility, you have paid scant attention to your corrections officers.

Jail Medical Care

Your Office provides medical care to all inmates. Your Office selects the provider. After the last bid process, your Office selected Wellpath because it was cheaper than the company that received the highest scores by the selection committee.

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Instead of being overseen by the Health Department, as it was for decades, your Office transferred oversight of the **medical** contract to the Correction Center.

The Correction Center does not have to keep felons with serious medical concerns—they can be relocated to other State prisons.

My Office, on the other hand, cannot do that. We must accept everyone who comes to the facilities. When people are arrested while recovering from transplant surgery, or gunshot wounds, or in the middle of cancer treatment, or who need oxygen or wheelchairs, my Office has no choice—they must be admitted.

The Sheriff's Office and the Health Department, under prior administrations, have argued strenuously for a step-down unit for such patients. The majority of deaths in the jails are medically related. Families whose loved ones committed suicide or who died of overdoses often ask whether mental health professionals were seeing them or were receiving care for withdrawal.

Does your Office know if your medical provider is properly staffing the facilities? Is the surge due to the Memphis Safe Task Force arrests stretching their personnel thin? What is your Office doing about it?

Budget Concerns

My Office has always planned for emergencies, never knowing what may happen or when. When there are no emergencies, my Office has always returned the funding to the general fund. Unlike previous Mayors who carefully planned their budgets, your Office has used my Office's money via the salary restriction mechanism to pay for raises for all employees and other core functions of your Office.

The State Comptroller has told us that your budget has been deficient for 5 years, and you have never accepted the generous offer of assistance. Now, the consequence of that inaction is that the county bond rating will probably be lowered, if your Office could even get bonds, and your Office almost missed payroll for the entire County.

When you made changes to my Office's budget, which is the subject of ongoing litigation, your Office told me not to worry, that whatever money was needed would be made available. Sadly, that is not the case.

Your predecessor left you with a balanced budget and funds in "the bank." All of that has been squandered, despite a massive influx of cash during COVID. We can only hope that

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you are working with the State Comptroller to learn how to prepare and present a budget properly.

Privatization of the Jail

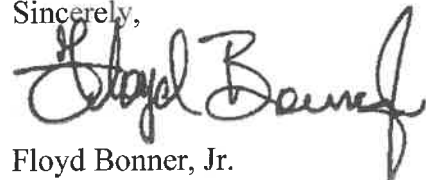
Your suggestion to privatize the jails is the most reckless that you have made. Not only is it not your decision to make, but it is also a terrible decision. You have clearly not done any research or spoken with community members about such a plan. Quick research shows the consequences of such decisions in the field of corrections.

An example of why privatization would be a bad idea is the Nashville jail's failure to pass inspection due to overcrowding. The Davidson County Sheriff was forced to operate another facility previously run by a private company, which quickly led to overcrowding. Although he had built a new jail before that happened, there was not enough capacity. He said, "We are spending over a million dollars a year on band aids on those facilities -- they are old." The Davidson County Sheriff said the cost of doing nothing will be higher. In June 2025, the facilities were 300 over capacity.

It would be devastating for our community, and I hope and pray that you will learn more before speaking and help rather than hinder my Office.

I remain committed to fulfilling the constitutional responsibilities entrusted to my office, and I expect the full cooperation of all elected partners in that work. While past support has been limited, I am confident that, moving forward, you will join me in meeting these obligations to the community we both serve. Together, we can—and must—ensure that our community receives the services they are entitled to under the law.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Floyd Bonner, Jr.", written in a cursive style.

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cc: Honorable Commissioner Shante K. Avant, Chairwoman
Shelby County Board of Commissioners