



January 28, 2026

Dear Harris County Commissioners Court,

I am writing to express Texas Appleseed's concern regarding [Agenda Item 99](#), which is being considered during tomorrow's Commissioners' Court. Hiring an additional 131 detention officers without an underlying staffing analysis and jail-population data from HCSO demonstrating this expansion is necessary is fiscally unsound and risks further eroding public trust. If data were shared with the court to substantiate the claim for these funds, we respectfully ask the court to make it publicly available before taking action. Additionally, the Court should confirm whether all currently funded detention officer positions are filled. Increasing the authorized headcount will not address operational gaps if HCSO is unable to recruit and retain existing vacancies.

It is stated that the trigger for this proposal is the Texas Commission on Jail Standards' [notice of non-compliance](#) for failing to transport incarcerated individuals to their medical appointments. We agree that missed medical appointments must be addressed immediately. But adding officers, instead of addressing the driver of this issue, overpopulation, treats a symptom rather than a cause. The proper solution actually lies in decreasing the jail population. We invite you to consider one of the plethora of alternatives to accomplish that goal.

A policy initiative proven to decrease jail populations is "cite and release", a [statutory allowance](#) that permits law enforcement in Texas to issue a citation in lieu of an arrest for specific Class A and Class B misdemeanors. Eligible offenses include possession of certain controlled substances, theft of property or service, graffiti, possession of contraband in a correctional facility, and driving without a valid license. The very [purpose](#) of enacting this legislation, supported by then-Senator Whitmire, was to reduce the strain on the criminal justice system from low-level, non-violent offenses.

While Harris County has its own cite-and-release policy, so does the City of Houston. The latter is more "comprehensive" regarding when an officer would need to make an arrest over issue a citation. When a city within a county has policies that differ from the county's, variation in their application should be expected. A jurisdictional analysis of cite-and-release in the City of Houston between 2019 and 2021 shows that citation-eligible arrests occur more frequently among Harris County residents living in Central and Southwest. Our review of these local arrest patterns suggests that a meaningful share of jail admissions could be avoided by aligning policies and ensuring consistent implementation and accountability.

Additionally, arrests for low-level theft (48%), criminal mischief (19%), and driving while license is invalid (23%) constitute the majority of citation-eligible arrests made by HPD (this data is on

file with Texas Applesseed). Given that the jurisdictional analysis controlled for multiple charges and excluded arrests that were ineligible for citation due to the additional charge(s), this means that people who are engaging in low-level, non-violent offenses are unnecessarily being exposed to a detention setting that has repercussions disproportionate to the underlying act, including:

- There is a [greater likelihood of taking a plea deal](#) to get out of jail, despite guilt or innocence
- A [decrease in employment and more difficulty in obtaining benefits](#),
- A [greater likelihood of receiving a harsher sentence](#),
- A [greater likelihood of committing future crimes](#) and,
- A [greater likelihood of engaging in new criminal activity pre-trial](#).

Another mechanism for decreasing the jail population and reducing staffing pressure is to examine who is already incarcerated and why. For example, research consistently shows that technical revocations of probation or parole (violations without a new criminal conviction) [contribute to an increase in local jail populations](#). Importantly, noncompliance with supervision conditions does not necessarily indicate that a person presents a public safety threat or will engage in new criminal activity. Technical violations like missed check-ins, failed drug tests, curfew violations, or skipped treatments are treated like new offenses, [resulting in costly and unnecessary incarceration](#). What's more, these are often signs of service needs, not carceral ones. The CSG Justice Center's state corrections survey work (with the Correctional Leaders Association and Arnold Ventures) [found](#) that in 2023, 7,276 people in Texas were incarcerated for technical violations (an 11% increase from 2022). Additionally, the Urban Institute [found](#) that people in jail or prison for these violations experienced considerably *longer* stays.

We respectfully urge you to pause or defer Agenda Item 99 and instead direct HCSO and relevant county departments to provide, at a minimum, the following before any vote on expanding detention staffing:

- The ratio of detention officers to detainees, month by month, over the past 3 years.
- The status of non-compliance for the referenced standard for the past 3 years.
- The number of currently budgeted filled and vacant positions, vacancy rates by facility, and annual attrition rates.
- The number of missed medical appointments, by facility, and the primary reasons.
- Current population breakdowns to show how many people are held for citation-eligible offenses and technical revocations, and how long those individuals remain in custody.

- A plan to reduce population through an increased and *consistent* use of cite and release (including data reporting and analysis of denials), and coordination with municipal partners to reduce policy variation.
- A plan to reduce unnecessary confinement for technical supervision by prioritizing noncustodial responses and service linkages where appropriate.

Texas Appleseed welcomes the opportunity to meet and share additional analysis and options for improving the criminal justice system in Harris County. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,  
Natasha Malik, Esq.  
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Criminal Justice Project