



Washtenaw County Sheriff's Office

Sheriff, Jerry L. Clayton

Media Release

Public Notice: Sheriff Clayton Announces Debt Forgiveness of Jail Accounts

2/4/2021

Washtenaw County Sheriff, Jerry L. Clayton is asking for our community partners and community members to help spread the word to individuals who were incarcerated in the Washtenaw County Jail at anytime from January 1, 2013 to December 31, 2020. The Washtenaw County Sheriff's Office with support of the Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners, is formally announcing Sheriff Clayton's decision to forgive any and all outstanding jail debt for individuals who accrued that debt while incarcerated within the Washtenaw County Jail.

Under the State Correctional Facility Reimbursement Act, Sheriffs have the right to recover any and all monies that incarcerated individuals owe as a result of their incarceration. The Sheriff's Office is committed to ensuring that everyone in our custody receives appropriate care and is treated with dignity and respect. Each individual that is lodged in our facility for more than twenty-four hours receives a set of items free of charge that is intended to help meet their basic needs. Anyone needing additional supplies and services can purchase them from our Commissary or as part of our larger Incarceration Services architecture. Individuals that receive these items and services without the financial ability to pay, incur a debt. Historically, the WCSO has not aggressively pursued non-payment of this debt through creditors or other means, but the debt held over someone can add to the stress associated with their day-to-day living.

"Our decision to eliminate this debt reflects our understanding of the stress and financial burden of incarceration," said Jerry Clayton, Sheriff of Washtenaw County. "We know that as people leave our jail in hope of positioning themselves to be successful upon returning home, the burden of jail debt is an added negative factor that can undermine their attempt at reintegration and feed the cycle of incarceration. We also know that incarceration can seriously compromise a person's ability to generate income, leading to even more debt. It's this absurd cycle, along with reincarceration, that we are focused on."

During a recent review of the debt owed since 2013, corrections staff were able to identify 31,614 individuals impacted by a total debt of \$509,888.

Relieving the burden of debt for individuals impacts jail operations in several ways.

1. Without the debt, individuals are better positioned to meet their basic needs beyond what the jail provides. When basic needs are met, behavior within the jail is improved.



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This is a key contributor to maintaining safety for staff, volunteers, and incarcerated individuals.

2. Individuals with existing debt are reluctant to seek basic services, like seeing the doctor or visiting the dentist for fear of incurring additional debt. This leads to more significant medical and dental conditions and may result in more expensive emergency care. County taxpayers are financially obligated to cover emergency care and subsequently the budgetary impact on jail operations is significant.
3. Currently, if a family member of incarcerated individuals deposits money into an account where debt is owed, the amount deposited is seized and allocated towards the debt. This discourages families from financially supporting their incarcerated loved ones and in some cases is a barrier to family involvement and reunification.

The WCSO has previously taken steps to reduce the cost of incarceration in several ways. While some agencies negotiate for higher call rates to increase commissions, we recognized the financial burden that these rates place on friends and family. As a result, in 2018 we negotiated the following reduction from 2018 fees:

- Initial 2018 Fees
 - \$4.25 connection fee
 - Local call rates .25 cents per minute
 - Non-local calls were .30 cents per minute
- New Contract as of 2019
 - Eliminated connection fees entirely
 - .21 cents per minute on all calls local or non-local
- In addition, during the first 2 months of Covid-19 we provided access to 2 free 15 minute calls per week in order to stay in touch with family, friends, and counsel.
- Incarcerated individuals that do not have the means or support to purchase supplies are considered indigent. In 2019 we both increased the monetary allocation for individuals that are indigent from \$3 to \$5 per week and expanded the kinds of items they could purchase using those funds.

We are currently exploring changes to the following fees for services :

- Barber = \$15.00
- Copies = (paperwork for those incarcerated) .10 cents per copy
- Dentist = \$10.00 (Normal dental visit. Emergency care is provided separately)
- Doctor = \$10.00 (Normal Dr. visit. Emergency care is provided separately)
- Indigent Individuals = allowed \$5.00/week effective last year. Prior to that it was \$3.50/week.



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- Medical slips (over the counter meds) = .50 cents per dose.
- Nurse visits = \$3.00
- Intake kits (items individuals receive above and beyond standard issued items) - \$3.30 for hygiene kits / \$2.30 for stationary kits
- State booking fees = \$12.00

Breakdown of existing Booking Fees and Incarceration Services related debt owed since 2013:

- Booking Fees- 17,198 individuals = 291,318.52
- Barber – 743 individuals = \$21,729.68
- Copies – 26 individuals = \$66.95
- Dentist – 311 individuals = \$4,633.06
- Doctor – 998 individuals = \$17,398.67
- Indigent – 2902 individuals = \$73,560.46
- Medical slips – 4583 individuals = \$64,867.18
- Nurse visits – 1622 individuals = \$10,718.97
- Intake kits – 3231 individuals = \$25,594.51

What are the standard issued items?

When someone enters the Washtenaw County jail they are given deodorant, a comb, soap, tooth brush, tooth paste, and a razor. Standard practice in many jails are limited to a bar of soap, deodorant, toothbrush, toothpaste and feminine hygiene products.

What is commissary and how does it work?

Commissary is like the jail store where people can buy products and food. In order to use commissary you must have money in your jail account. Often times family and friends deposit money so that their loved one can purchase supplies. If someone has current debt within the jail then the money sent by family is used to cover that existing debt. Anything left is then added to the individuals account.

Does debt impact someone's ability to post bond?

No. Debt incurred while you are incarcerated does not in any way impact your ability to post bond.

What debt is forgiven?

Any debt incurred while incarcerated within the Washtenaw County Jail prior to January 1, 2021 has been forgiven.



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"An educated and engaged community is our best partner" – Sheriff, Jerry L. Clayton

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