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A Typology of Virginia Jails and their Administrative Sources

Though extant literature explores some of the administrative and financial relationships of state prisons, local and regional jails are more often overlooked by the scholarly conversation around incarceration. This may be because they are smaller and their administrative structures are not conducive to the centralization of information in the same way as a state system of prisons. Nevertheless, the status and governance of jails is relevant because of the significant increase in incarceration that is in part driven by rising jail populations, in Virginia and the United States more broadly. This examination will be focused around the obvious—yet sometimes unstated—fact that the drivers of incarceration are almost entirely insulated from its costs, both socially and financially. It is the financial cost which will be analyzed here, as Virginia's system of jails presents a complex system where multiple financial sources contribute to jails in order to cover the cost of incarceration in a manner which is unobtrusive to its drivers.

Rather than a direct hierarchical structure with a single funding source, the administrative and funding sources for Virginia's jails are networks of disparate actors. These networks can be characterized in terms of Suzanne Mettler's theory in *The Submerged State* (2011) as unseen costs are distributed through an opaque system, which obfuscates responsibility in a manner damaging to democratic accountability. In this typology, Virginia's system of jails will first be characterized by type in administration, then in terms of funding sources, and then an analysis of funding disparity will be conducted.

Introduction

This examination will focus on jails in the state of Virginia and the systems by which they are administered and funded. A challenge of examining the types of structures involved in

¹ "State Incarceration Trends Virginia" (Vera Institute of Justice, December 2019), https://www.vera.org/downloads/pdfdownloads/pdfdownloads/state-incarceration-trends-virginia.pdf.

this system is that in Virginia, as in some other states, the state itself does not exercise direct administrative authority over jails, and so they are divided between localities in a sort of non-system, which receives funding from a combination of sources both state and local. A report from the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services demonstrates the extent of the disconnect, suggesting that "system" implies too great a degree of unity, more accurately stated: Virginia has a "loose collection of independent local and regional correctional facilities."

Types of Jails in Virginia

Virginia's jails can be divided chiefly into two categories: local jails and regional jails. These two types differ both in the governance of the jail and in the origin of the inmates housed in the jail. In this section, local and regional jails are defined and their variations are discussed, noting the differing implications for administrative accountability.

Local jails, sometimes known as "county jails" or "city jails" serve one jurisdiction (though they may hold inmates for others) and are managed by the local sheriff elected in that jurisdiction.³ Local jails receive state and local funding, and vary widely in physical size, inmate capacity, and per-inmate costs. The sheriff is the principal administrator of these jails, and they are funded through a combination of funding from the locality and the state.

Regional jails serve multiple jurisdictions and incarcerate inmates from multiple counties, which may operate their own local jails within their jurisdictions as well. Regional jails, like local jails, receive a combination of state and local funding, though their local funding comes from agreements between the participating jurisdictions contributing funds rather than one

² "Virginia's Peculiar System of Local and Regional Jails" (Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services, Spring 2010), 4, https://www.dcjs.virginia.gov/sites/dcjs.virginia.gov/files/publications/research/virginias-peculiar-system-local-and-regional-jails.pdf.

³ "Virginia's Peculiar System of Local and Regional Jails," 3.

singular county. Rather than being governed by a local sheriff, they are administered by a superintendent and a board made up of the local sheriffs of participating jurisdictions and representatives of the participating local governments, and can also have additional administrators.⁴

With jails being locally (and regionally) administered, there is substantial opportunity for variation in approach for local sheriffs or superintendents (of course, this ability exists because of the state funds which provide for the jail's function). Virginia's Jails have several divides beyond individual administration as well, such as their locations in rural or urban settings, which affect local trends in police practices, crime distribution, and drug use patterns.⁵ Notable with these differences is the variation in capacity and cost of jails, with the largest in the state being Southwest Virginia Regional Jail (which operates multiple facilities in the southwest region) with a capacity of 1,376, and the smallest being Lancaster County Jail, with a capacity of 26.⁶

With these differences, costs of incarceration can vary widely with Fairfax County Jail operating at the highest cost of \$354.59 per inmate/day and Northern Neck Regional Jail at a low of \$50.07 per inmate/day (2020 data).⁷ For these local variations in costs, differences in the services provided, and in the amount of local funds that supplement state funds account for some of the major disparities. The variance in costs for the operations of local jails may be contrasted with the variance in state prisons. For major state institutions, the operating costs per prisoner range from low to high at \$73.20 per inmate/day (Augusta Correctional Center) to \$274.80 per

⁴ Code of Virginia § 51.3-106; this is the section of the Code of Virginia that outlines the governing boards of regional jails and jail farms.

⁵ Brandon K. Applegate and Alicia H. Sitren, "The Jail and the Community: Comparing Jails in Rural and Urban Contexts," *Prison Journal* 88, no. 2 (2008): 254.

⁶ Fiscal Year 2020 Jail Cost Report," Report to the General Assembly, Jail Cost Report (Virginia Compensation Board, November 1, 2021), https://www.scb.virginia.gov/docs/fy20jailcostreport.pdf. 98 (Southwest Regional), 68 (Lancaster).

⁷ "Fiscal Year 2020 Jail Cost Report," p. iii.

inmate/day (Marion Correctional Treatment Center).⁸ This variation is best explained by the highest cost being at institutions for the mentally ill, which provide additional medical services and have a higher staff-to-prisoner ratio.

The uniqueness of Virginia's local and regional jails provides an interesting instance where the state government's influence is submerged below the local administration. Though the state mains regulatory power over jails, local sheriffs are given a wide berth and jails receive funding from multiple sources to incarcerate individuals for the local and state justice system. To an outside observer, one may not be aware that a local or regional jail, though managed by local authorities, is a partial product of state funding (or, alternately, one may simply assume the state directly manages all jails, and be surprised to find the primary authority flowing from the local sheriff).

The Administrative Relationships of Virginia Jails

Virginia's jails, both local and regional, have a network of relationships that administers and regulates their operation. The most notable division in this network is between the managers of the jail and the funders of the jail—between the sheriff and the state and county, which excludes drivers of incarceration for which the jail must account. In this section, a network of actors will be enumerated, all of which in some way affect the administration of Virginia's jails. The history of this arrangement, in which authority is diffuse and funding comes from divided sources, will also be examined.

⁸ Daily costs retrieved from annual costs in: "Virginia Department of Corrections Annual Management Information Summary Report for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2021," FY 2021 VADOC Annual Report (Virginia Department of Corrections, FY 2021), 28, https://vadoc.virginia.gov/media/1725/vadoc-financial-annual-mis-report-2021.pdf.

Although no state agency has direct control over jails (like the Department of Corrections has over prisons), there are several state government entities that influence operation through their regulation or funding, these include:

- The State Board of Local and Regional Jails (formerly the State Board of Corrections)
 which sets standards for jails and approves construction, investigates deaths in jails, and
 can move to decertify non-compliant jails;⁹
- The Department of Corrections (DOC), which monitors compliance with BOC standards
 through visits and inspections, and provides state funding for jail construction;
- The state Compensation Board (CB), which funds the operation costs, personnel salaries,
 and inmate per-diem payments (maintaining a database of inmates in order to ensure
 accurate payment);
- The Department of Criminal Justice Services, which establishes training standards for personnel and reviews construction plans;
- The Treasury Board and Virginia Public Building Authority, which may be involved in jail construction;
- And the Department of Health, which inspects jails for compliance with health/safety standards.¹⁰

These are the central actors in a system where funding and standards come from the state government, but actual administration is under the authority of local officials. The effect of this structure on the individual administrators is difficult to characterize, though analyses of jail

⁹ Code of Virginia Article 2 "State Board of Corrections" § 53.1; Virginia Administrative Code 6VAC15.

¹⁰ "Virginia's Peculiar System of Local and Regional Jails," 4.

administrators do exist and have found administrative divisions to be sources of conflict amongst jail budget officials. With these divisions, one may note that the state standards from jails come from one entity within the network, and state funding comes from another.

The development of this particular administrative arrangement, with state money being disbursed by the state Compensation Board, can be traced back to a legal change which occurred in 1943, which implemented salaries for jail deputies in addition to the extant per diem payments the state previously provided to sheriffs. *The History of Corrections in Virginia* (1986) provides some useful details on the development of jails. In the early 1900s, Virginia's jails relied on county boards which operated without state standards and answered to citizens who were broadly disinterested in the conditions of jails. ¹² In a 1933 study on the state's jails, conducted by faculty at the University of Virginia, they explain more of this old administrative structure, the drawbacks of which led to the implementation of the current system, though many of the same issues persist.

Unlike the current system where inmate per diems are paid through the State

Compensation Board as well as salaries for sheriffs and jail personnel, the previous system

involved the payment of only a per diem for the boarding of prisoners to the sheriff from the

state treasury. Sheriffs were the administrators, while county boards were responsible for

maintaining jail facilities and providing additional funding. Sheriffs were generally poorly paid,

and received their payment from county funded salaries (which at most times were meager), as

¹¹ Donald E. Piwowarski, "A Critical Budgeting Component for a 'Forgotten Government': A Case Study of Budgeting for County Jail Facilities" (Ph.D., United States, Northern Illinois University, 2008), https://www.proquest.com/docview/304541026/abstract/DD854246CC714489PQ/1. This work is discussed further in the Financial Relationships section.

¹² Paul W. Keve, *The History of Corrections in Virginia* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1986) 144.

well as the state funding for the boarding of prisoners, and fees.¹³ The whole system was also under the authority of the courts, though they rarely exercised their oversight powers.¹⁴

A main component of this system with regard to state funding was the ability for sheriffs to profit from what state funds were not used for the feeding of prisoners—when costs were kept down on food expenses, the remaining funds were the sheriff's pay. A fixed rate was paid by the state on a per-prisoner *per diem* adjusted based on total prisoner population.¹⁵

The system of funding for Virginia's jails was indicated as a systemic flaw in the 1933 study. The old per-diem system was seen as a mechanism that left jail administrators unaccountable, with no motivation to improve jail conditions or be economic in management strategy so long as the state was covering costs in prisoner per diems. The University of Virginia investigators quote the Commissioner of the State Department of Public Welfare, who offered that:

The anomalies, the abuses, the penological shortcomings of the jails are due in large measure to this lack of state control. Under this system, the larger profit has been in the more inadequate and unsatisfactory institutions—for the bill is payable regardless of the character of the service rendered. There is no incentive to develop a system of production to reduce expenses where someone else pays all bills. Anything that would tend to reduce the jail population is undesirable because it would reduce the income. ... It matters not that the jail, because of crowded conditions, lack of equipment, absence of occupational facilities, proper supervision, or any corrective program, is a veritable school of crime, for on the school's population the school lives. ¹⁶

¹³ Frank William Hoffer, Delbert Martin Mann, and Floyd Nelson House, *The Jails of Virginia* (The University of Virginia Institute for Research in the Social Sciences, 1933), 150–51.

¹⁴ Hoffer, Mann, and House, *The Jails of Virginia*, 124–25.

¹⁵ Keve, The History of Corrections in Virginia, 145; Hoffer, Mann, and House, The Jails of Virginia, 96.

¹⁶ Arthur W. James, Commissioner of the State Department of Public Welfare, from an unpublished manuscript quoted in: Frank William Hoffer, Delbert Martin Mann, and Floyd Nelson House, *The Jails of Virginia* (The University of Virginia Institute for Research in the Social Sciences, 1933) 120–21.

The study identified several problems which, in some manner, resemble the problems of today around funding. The study concluded that smaller counties did not have the resources to finance their own jails, that "in all except the large urban centers and a few counties, the administrative and financial unit is too small to … maintain the type of institution and the trained personnel required."¹⁷ This situation was such that some advocated for total state control of short term confinement. Ultimately, the current funding system would be adopted around a decade later and come by an act of the Virginia General Assembly.

In 1942, an act by the General Assembly ended the use of the antiquated fee system, and established a system of state salaries for sheriffs and personnel in addition to the per diems; the state Compensation Board, an existing state agency, would now be responsible for these payments. ¹⁹ The board, which was established in 1934, would become the responsible agency for the state portion of jail funding. Though the funding was in part reformed, the problems with local divisions of authority would remain unresolved. These relationships will be explored further as the financial relationships of Virginia's jails.

The Financial Relationships of Virginia Jails

The state provision of funding, and the mechanism through which this is done (without direct administrative authority) makes Virginia unique. The state funds jails through the Virginia State Compensation Board, however it does not have direct authority over their operation, this authority is vested in local sheriffs (for local jails) and superintendents (for regional jails); the state funds the compensation of jail guards/deputies, however these work below the local

¹⁷ Hoffer, Mann, and House, *The Jails of Virginia*, 368.

¹⁸ Hoffer, Mann, and House, *The Jails of Virginia*, 369–71.

¹⁹ Keve, The History of Corrections in Virginia, 183.

authority which operates the jail.²⁰ In this section, this financial relationship between jail, county, and state will be examined in greater detail, and an analogous account of the multi-step budgeting process will be presented.

Virginia's jails operate with a mix of state and local funding. In addition to Virginia's state-provided funds for the administration of local jails, counties also raise their own funds. In a breakdown of funding by percentage, the State Compensation Board found that state provided 34.7% and localities 51.0% of total funds for jail expenditures. This distribution is not uniform across different jails, as localities are not required to provide funds, though all but one do provide some. The proportion of funds provided by county governments for local jails varies by jurisdiction, and variation also exists in the funding of staff positions within the jails, as counties may hire additional staff to those funded by the state. In terms of personnel funding, the State funded 8,504 positions, and localities funded an additional 1,716 positions (FY 2020). Ome localities hire additional staff with local funds (which include jail guards and others) whereas others spend only state-provided funds on personnel salaries. The jail then has a financial relationship to the county and the state as sources of staffing resources.

The variation in percentage of local to state funds for jail administration is affected by region and county economic status. In a regional breakdown, it was found that localities in Northern Virginia provide the greatest portion of local funding towards jails, whereas Southwest Virginia provides the least local funding.²⁵ This poses an interesting contrast, as counties in

²⁰ "Virginia's Peculiar System of Local and Regional Jails," 3.

²¹ "Fiscal Year 2020 Jail Cost Report," 7.

²² Northern Neck Regional Jail is the exception, the locality provides no funds to the jail; it is 31.04% state funded, 50.23% federally funded, and receives 17.73% from other sources. From: "Fiscal Year 2020 Jail Cost Report," 80, 27–8.

²³ "Virginia's Peculiar System of Local and Regional Jails," 5–6.

²⁴ "Fiscal Year 2020 Jail Cost Report," 1.

²⁵ "Fiscal Year 2020 Jail Cost Report," 9.

Northern Virginia tend to be wealthier and more densely populated than those in the southwest. Also relevant in this regard is the variance in jail admissions in these jurisdictions, as southwest Virginia has a greater rate of jail admissions per capita than northern Virginia.²⁶ The interaction between county and state is then colored by the locality's resources.

For jails in localities where local funds account for a lower proportion of costs, and therefore rely more heavily on state funds, one may be inclined to believe that the state then exercises greater control over the administration of the facility. However, the operation still takes place within the "system" (or non-system) outlined above, where no state agency has direct authority over the local jails. The power of local sheriffs and superintendents is not unmitigated (as regulations and standards set by the State Board of Local and Regional Jails and other departments still apply) but it appears to be a locality's choice as to the level of funds it provides.

Piwowarski's (2008) examination of local jail budgeting processes in Illinois may provide some insight into a county's process of budgeting for its jail (though Virginia's system has the additional complications of the state's funds). The expenditures of a jail are determined by legislative and judicial action and their revenue streams are limited (putting them in indirect competition for funding with other county-level services), this makes their budgeting process especially complex.²⁷ Piwowarski's Illinois examination notes that, though the sheriff is the administrator of the jail and the prosecutor the determiner of its inhabitants, both are funded by the local county board (as is the jail itself).²⁸ In Virginia, there are additional complications in

²⁶ "Incarceration Trends," Vera Institute of Justice, accessed February 26, 2022, https://trends.vera.org/. This resource maps jail admissions per-capita across the United States.

See also: "State Incarceration Trends Virginia" (Vera Institute of Justice, December 2019), https://www.vera.org/downloads/pdfdownloads/pdfdownloads/state-incarceration-trends-virginia.pdf.

²⁷ Piwowarski, "A Critical Budgeting Component for a 'Forgotten Government," 3, 7.

²⁸ Piwowarski, "A Critical Budgeting Component for a 'Forgotten Government," 24–25

that the state Compensation Board funds Commonwealth's attorneys offices, which (in a similar fashion to local jails) also receive funding from localities.²⁹

Piwowarski's process (which was based on observed local jail budgeting procedures) becomes more complicated with Virginia's additional funding sources. Piwowarski's process is outlined below:

- Jail administrators and supervisors prepare a budget request, the request is sent to the sheriff's fiscal officer;
- The fiscal officer reviews the request and compiles it with others, finalizing the budget for approval by the sheriff;
- The sheriff reviews the requested budget, makes modifications, and sends it to the county finance department;
- The county finance department reviews requests from all county departments with projected county revenues, then sends the requested budget to the committees of the county board;
- The county board reviews, evaluates, modifies (or sends back for review at a lower level),
 and approves the county budget.³⁰

The Virginia system adds the following steps as well:

The sheriff submits a request for funds from the State Compensation Board.³¹

²⁹ Code of Virginia § 15.2-1626. For our example in Fairfax County, the state provided around half of the funding required (\$2.04 million provided out of \$4.3 million total expenses), though this is a large county with a correspondingly large caseload; from: FY 2022 Adopted Budget Plan, Volume 1: General Fund.

³⁰ Piwowarski, "A Critical Budgeting Component for a 'Forgotten Government," 46–48.

³¹ Code of Virginia § 15.2-1636.7. Sheriffs submit requests for funds to the Compensation Board.

The Board evaluates the request and disburses funds (in per diems as personnel salaries)
 for the jail.

From this overview two takeaways are evident: (1) local jails' budgets are determined by a combination of factors at the local and state level, however these factors are tangential to the direct managerial authority of the jail, and jail administrators must make requests of both county and state officials who face election and competing sectors for the disbursement of revenue, and (2) the combination of funding sources means that no single source reflects the full financial cost of incarceration in the state's jails, not to mention the administrative and social costs that may result from a network of funders and regulators where responsibility is distributed throughout.

Funding Disparity and Tax-Base Proportional Analysis

As has been previously noted, Virginia's jails vary in type (local and regional), in numerical capacity and physical size, in cost, and in the amount of funds received from the state. In this section, a comparative analysis will be conducted with data from two county jails, attempting to contextualize the impact of the reception of state funds on the county in terms of county funds "saved" by the state. In this manner, the state-county interaction of "saving" is noted as a product of the relationship each has with the jail.

The available tax base will vary across counties, and (as previously seen) counties' contributions as a percentage of their jail's funding vary as well. Although wealthier counties (such as Loudoun and Fairfax) contribute a greater percentage to their local jails than poorer counties (particularly in the rural southwest of the state), their tax base is also larger to begin with. This poses a question as to if the amount provided by the state for the funding of jails in more rural, less populated localities offsets county-level costs to such a degree that (in proportion

to their tax base) the rural counties' jails are supplemented *both* in higher percentage and in value saved by the state.

County Tax Base Contrast³² (all figures in thousands, 2020 data)

County	County Tax	Jail Cost (total)		County Contribution		State Contribution	
	Revenues		% of Tax		% of Tax		% of Tax
Loudoun	\$1,659,260	\$33,516	2.02	\$21,791	1.13	\$5,962	0.36
Botetourt	\$57,548	\$7,417	12.89	\$4,312	7.49	\$2,042	3.55

Fig. 1

Above a comparison is laid out between Loudoun County and Botetourt County, both of which operate county jails. (Figures here may be rudimentary, as they are taken from annual budget reports with intergovernmental transfers excluded from county tax revenues.) Though these facilities have several differences in terms of number of inmates housed and cost of incarceration per day, the above comparison attempts to contextualize the state Compensation Board contribution in terms of the county's tax base.

In the "Jail Cost" column, the total annual cost of operation for the county's jail is listed, and then calculated as a percentage of the county's tax revenue. This column operates as a whatif, the percentages represent the impact on budget if each county had to fund the full cost of its jail. Botetourt is at a clear disadvantage, as the total cost of operating its jail would be almost 13% of its local revenue. Loudoun, which collects much more revenue, would only need to sacrifice

³² Expenditure totals and county contributions from: Fiscal Year 2020 Jail Cost Report. State contribution is total of "Commonwealth Funded" (salaries and per diems) as well as "other" commonwealth funding.

Loudoun County tax revenue shown as "Revenue from Local Sources" (not including funds from State or Federal Government) from: "Loudoun County Comprehensive Annual Financial Report" (Loudoun County Department of Finance & Budget, 2020), 121 https://www.loudoun.gov/DocumentCenter/View/163183/Fiscal-Year-2020-Comprehensive-Annual-Financial-Report.

Botetourt County tax revenue as "Total General Revenue" (no included intergovernmental transfers) from: "Botetourt County Comprehensive Financial Report 2020" (Botetourt County Department of Financial Services, 2020), 31 https://www.botetourtva.gov/Archive/ViewFile/Item/58.

2.02% of its local revenue to fund its jail (which, as explained below, is also larger and more expensive than Botetourt).

The "County Contribution" column represents the total local-jurisdictional funds provided to operate the jail (as reported in the FY2020 Jail Cost Report). These are the actual figures which the counties contribute, and though Loudoun's contribution is larger, it represents a smaller proportion of overall tax revenue expended. Botetourt, by contrast, must contribute a sum which equivalent to 7.49% of its tax revenue to fund its jail.

The "State Contribution" column represents the total funds provided by the Virginia Compensation Board (in staff salaries and prisoner per-diems) and shows these figures as a percentage of county tax revenue. This percentage might be considered the portion that is "saved" by the state contribution. Though the Board provides Loudoun more than double what Botetourt receives in terms of real dollars, to Loudoun this is 0.36% of tax revenue saved. For Botetourt, the funds provided amount to a savings of 3.55%—triple the financial impact seen by Loudoun.

Botetourt County Jail has 124 beds and has an operating cost of \$128.59 per inmate day.³³ Loudoun County Jail has 460 beds and an operating cost of \$228.89 per inmate day.³⁴ Even though Loudoun County Jail is larger and more expensive, the overall impact of its cost on the county's budget is smaller (in proportion to tax base) than Botetourt's, respectively. In addition to the salaries provided by the Compensation Board (which funds 157 of its positions) Loudoun also employs 161 locally-funded staff; Botetourt's jail is staffed by 51 Compensation Board-funded positions and no locally-funded staff.³⁵ In this manner, the Compensation Board funding serves a

³³ "Fiscal Year 2020 Jail Cost Report," 51.

³⁴ "Fiscal Year 2020 Jail Cost Report," 69

³⁵ "Fiscal Year 2020 Jail Cost Report," 51, 69.

greater benefit to Botetourt as a less populous county with a smaller tax base, which, without the reception of additional funds, would have to sacrifice a greater portion of its budget to fund its jail.

Botetourt's jail receives 27.53% of its funding from the state, while Loudoun's receives 17.79%. ³⁶ This means that Botetourt sees a greater percentage of jail costs covered compared to Loudoun, though even if the percent of cost covered was equivalent for both counties the impact would be greater on Botetourt, as having a jail to begin with is proportionally more expensive (as seen in the "Jail Cost Total" column). This difference in funding is characteristic of the counties' regions, as Loudoun is in the more populous, wealthier north, and Botetourt the more sparsely populated southwest.

These disparities are the products of this system of funding and administration, where cost to some counties is proportionally reduced to a greater degree. Though perhaps more importantly, it cannot be said that any one singular entity in the network of actors bears the responsibility for this discrepancy. The financial costs, which are distributed between county and state, and the management of the jail, which is done by local sheriffs and regulated by state standards, both exist with no direct mechanism of correction to the cost-driving factors of prosecution and judiciary. The effects seen here are results of this loose network, systematic products of a "non-system."

³⁶ "Fiscal Year 2020 Jail Cost Report," 51, 69.

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