

Willacy County Regional Detention Facility Meets Key Needs for USMS Detainees

Management & Training Corporation (MTC) operates the Willacy County Regional Detention Facility for the U.S. Marshals Service (USMS). Located in Raymondville, Texas, the Willacy County Regional Detention Facility (WCRDF) has the capacity for 582 residents. MTC currently employs 212 dedicated staff who are trained to treat residents with respect and dignity. The Willacy County Regional Detention Facility plays a vital role for the USMS:



Proximity: Access to counsel and access to courts are critical to the mission of the USMS, the Judicial system, and the detainees. WCRDF is in close proximity to the two federal courts it serves, one in Brownsville, Texas, and one in McAllen, Texas. As of May 27, 2021, it held 550 individuals—524 for the Brownsville court and 26 for McAllen.



Safety and Security: WCRDF is accredited by the American Correctional Association (ACA) and the National Commission on Correctional Health Care (NCCHC). It is certified by the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA). It also meets all performance-based national detention standards.

WCRDF is equipped to support multiple individuals with varying risk levels. The facility has safely detained individuals with gang affiliations, drug cartel members, ex-law enforcement officers, and even a former Mexican Governor. WCRDF is used to housing detainees who have higher acuity chronic medical conditions and individuals who have chronic behavior issues; often these individuals are transferred from other facilities that are not equipped for higher risk detainees.

Lack of Viable Alternatives to Serve Individuals Assigned to Brownsville and McAllen Courts

The WCRDF provides USMS and detainees with vital support:

- Access to federal courts and legal counsel
- Robust medical care
- Nutritious food services
- Secure transports to appointments and escorts in federal courthouses
- A safe and secure living environment that meets Federal Performance-Based Detention Standards

Willacy County Regional Detention Facility

Staff: 212

Capacity: 582

Current Population: 550 (496 men; 54 women)

Security Level: Multi-level

Accreditations: ACA, NCCHC, PREA

Other Services: Education and Recreational Programming, Transportation Services, Fully Equipped Medical Team, Food Services with Daily Fresh Produce

- Dedicated capacity that can accommodate population fluctuations
- Oversight from nearby USMS deputies who ensure quality standards are met
- Educational, religious, and recreational programs

Other federal facilities or local jails that USMS could potentially use to house Brownsville or McAllen detainees are each lacking in one or more of these vital areas.

Utilizing BOP Facilities Limits Detainee Access to Courts and Legal Counsel

Where possible, USMS utilizes BOP facilities to house detainees. However, the closest BOP facilities to McAllen and Brownsville courts do not have available space to meet the approximately 600 individuals served by WCRDF on a daily basis.

These facilities also put detainees further away from courts and legal counsel. The closest BOP facilities are FCI Three Rivers, FCI Bastrop, and FDC Houston. Any of these BOP facilities would place individuals 5-11 hours round trip away from courts and legal counsel, making it challenging for individuals to attend court appointments and to meet with their legal representation.

	Willacy County Regional Detention Facility	FCI Three Rivers	FCI Bastrop	FDC Houston
McAllen Court				
One-Way Distance	46.1 miles	199.2 miles	310.3 miles	353 miles
Driving Time	42 minutes	2 hours 59 min	5 hours	5 hours 26 min
Brownsville Court				
One-Way Distance	53.8 miles	169 miles	333.3 miles	354 miles
Driving Time	52 minutes	2 hours 31 min	5 hours 14 min	5 hours 34 min


Utilizing Local Jails Poses a Problem with Safety, Security, and Quality

Another option for the USMS is to utilize any excess capacity in local jails in the Brownsville or McAllen area. However, it has been problematic to find facilities that meet needed quality, safety, and security standards. In April 2021, USMS explored the potential of using the Willacy County Jail or the Cameron County Detention Center to house detainees currently served by WCRDF. This exploration uncovered multiple limitations within the local jails, including:

- Inability to support detainees with ongoing medical needs
- Lack of dedicated food services
- Lack of staff to provide safe and secure transport to appointments
- Fare dedicated to meeting local criminal justice needs
- Failed to meet Federal Performance-Based Detention Standards
- Lack of education and recreation opportunities for detainees

These limitations were evidenced in multiple ways:

- In April 2021, the USMS moved 120 individuals to the neighboring Cameron County Detention Center—a jail operated by Cameron County. The jail has struggled to maintain staffing, and it is currently understaffed by approximately 90 people. Detainees being transferred to Cameron



County were selected because they did not have any medical issues and were low behavior risks, as the county was not willing to take higher risk individuals. However, some detainees have returned to WCRDF. In one case, a detainee needed hospitalization and the county jail did not provide the needed level of security—two armed guards-at the hospital. WCRDF had to take over guard services for that individual. WCRDF has also been asked to be prepared to accommodate any emergency transfers from this and other county jails.

- USMS also explored the option of utilizing the Willacy County Jail, a small jail operated independently by Willacy County. However, this facility had previously contracted with USMS to provide up to 24 beds for detainees, but the USMS was unable to utilize the contracted beds, as the facility failed to achieve the needed quality and safety standards. In addition, this facility relies upon WCRDF to provide all daily meals to the individuals in the jail.

Recommendation

The most viable option for the USMS is to enter into an IGSA with Willacy County and for the county to sub-contract the operations of that facility to an operator with the ability to ensure quality standards are met. This would align with recent actions taken by the USMS in Ohio. The USMS contract with Core Civic to operate the Northeast Ohio Correctional Center was scheduled to end 2/28/21. The USMS was able to extend the contract for 90 days; however, during that extension viable detention alternatives were not available. Because the facility provided needed capacity and was the best option to ensure a safe/secure environment in close proximity to courts, counsel, and family, the USMS opted to contract with the county through an IGSA. The county subcontracts with a private service provider to ensure the facility is safely operated.

The contract with MTC at WCRDF ends on September 30, 2021. When this contract ends, entering into an IGSA with Willacy County who would then subcontract with a service provider to operate the facility, would keep this facility open, ensuring individuals have a safe, secure, healthy environment in a facility that is near courts, legal counsel, and their families.