Alternatives for Collaboration and Consolidation of Massachusetts Correctional Facilities and Oversight

The Commission was established to study opportunities for collaboration and consolidation among the four bodies that share responsibility for custody and supervision in the Commonwealth: the Department of Correction, the county sheriffs, the Parole Board, and the Office of Community Corrections (more broadly, Probation). Central to that study, the Commission "shall develop a list of alternatives to the distribution of responsibilities and oversight of facilities and shall consider any positive and negative impacts of each alternative."

The legislature further directs the Commission to weigh a set of considerations in developing alternatives:

1. consider the long-term fiscal sustainability of the facilities and recognize the need to reduce the cost to taxpayers of maintaining and operating facilities below capacity;
2. recognize the need to provide safe and humane facilities for incarcerated persons;
3. preserve flexibility to respond in a cost-effective manner to changes in incarceration levels;
4. recognize the importance of evidence-based rehabilitative programming for incarcerated persons;
5. recognize the value of community-integrated reentry support services;
6. recognize the advantages of local facilities for pretrial confinement and short incarcerations;
7. recognize the advantages of local facilities in supporting family and community connections;
8. recognize the value of existing facilities and other investments;
9. recognize the need for increasing regional collaboration;
10. recognize the unique roles of sheriffs in varying urban and rural regions;
11. recognize the unique issues posed by incarcerating female and LGBTQ+ populations;
12. recognize the importance of addressing the social determinants of health in reentry services;
13. recognize the role that community organizations play in reentry services; and
14. recognize the alternative needs that county sheriffs may address.

Several of these considerations pull in different directions. For example, the goal of reducing the cost of under-used facility capacity may favor fewer and larger facilities. But there are distinct advantages of local facilities for pretrial detention, including easier transportation to court and closer connection to family and community. The alternatives that follow are presented with these tensions in mind.

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The Present Structure

Responsibility for incarceration and community supervision in Massachusetts is divided among four entities. Any alternative to the present distribution of responsibilities must begin from recognizing this structure, summarized in Table 4 below:

Table 4

Body	Primary Role	Accountability	Relevant Statutes
Department of Corrections (DOC)	Operates the state prison system for people serving state-prison sentences, generally longer than 2.5 years	Commissioner appointed within the Executive Office of Public Safety and Security (EOPSS)	M.G.L. c. 27 (Department of Correction); M.G.L. c. 124 (Powers and Duties of the Department of Correction); M.G.L. c. 125 (Correctional Institutions of the Commonwealth); M.G.L. c. 127 (Officers and Inmates of Penal and Reformatory Institutions, Paroles and Pardons)
14 county sheriffs	Operate jails (pretrial detention) and houses of correction for people serving sentences of up to 2.5 years in 13 counties	Independently elected; sheriffs' offices are state agencies that receive direct state budget appropriations	M.G.L. c. 34, §§ 3 and 14 (obligations regarding county jails and houses of correction and the power to build or repair facilities) (M.G.L. c. 34B (Abolition of County Government); M.G.L. c. 37 (Sheriffs); M.G.L. c. 125, (custody and control of jails and correctional oversight); M.G.L. c. 126 (Jails, Houses of Correction and Reformation, and County Industrial

			Farms); M.G.L. c. 127 (Officers and Inmates of Penal and Reformatory Institutions, Paroles and Pardons)
Parole Board	Decides parole release for state and county sentences and supervises parolees in the community	Within EOPSS; members are appointed by the Governor	M.G.L. c. 27, §§ 4-7 (powers and authority); M.G.L. c. 127, §§ 128-154 (administration of paroles and pardons, eligibility, hearing processes, and conditions of supervision)
Probation Service: Office of Community Corrections (OCC)	Supervises individuals on probation; funds and oversees the Office of Community Corrections and its Community Justice Support Centers (CJSCs)	Trial Court, under the Commissioner of Probation	M.G.L. c. 211F (Office of Community Corrections)

Structural Considerations

The Commission identified several structural features of the present system that any alternative must account for.

- *The independence of the sheriffs.* Sheriffs are independent state agencies, funded directly through the state budget and separately elected. They retain control of their own operations, though they are subject to budgetary control by the state legislature and to various forms of accountability review and operational requirements, inclusive of local, state, and federal audits.
- *Separation of powers.* The OCC sits within the judicial branch, while the DOC, the Parole Board, and the sheriffs are in the executive branch. Structural changes that move functions across that line implicate the separation of powers.
- *Courthouse transportation.* Moving people between facilities and courthouses is a recurring operational burden especially at the county level where most pre-trial inmates are held. The Commission observed approaches that reduce it, including centralized

transportation and dedicated rooms for court appearances. Greater use of technology for court appearances could further mitigate transportation concerns and inefficiencies. These approaches are relevant to several alternatives below, particularly those that would place people farther from the courts that hear their cases.

- *Recent budget action regarding oversight.* The FY2027 budget includes language relevant to oversight of correctional facilities, discussed with the state oversight board alternative below. Additional recommendations for fiscal accountability and oversight are included in the Office of Inspector General's *Final Report of Sheriffs' Budgets and Expenditures* (June 1, 2026), mandated by Section 164 of Chapter 73 of the Acts of 2025.

Consolidation and Collaboration Alternatives

The alternatives presented here are informed by several sources: the historical statutory, regulatory, and policy framework of corrections in the Commonwealth; testimony from ~~state~~ agencies, interested parties, advocates, and people with lived experience; observations during visits to facilities and Community Justice Support Centers; and the expertise of Commission members.

How to read the alternatives

The alternatives are not mutually exclusive. They may be considered individually, combined, or phased in over time. Some may serve as progressive steps toward broader collaboration or consolidation, whether of part of the system or of the system as a whole. A coordinating structure adopted in the near term, for example, could lay the groundwork for more extensive regional or structural change later.

Four categories of alternatives

The Commission identified alternatives in four categories, each reflecting a distinct area of opportunity:

A. *Consolidating and coordinating management* — changes to how the system is governed and overseen, ranging from voluntary coordination to full unification.
B. *Merging facilities and reallocating jurisdiction* — changes to how beds are shared and/or how facilities are assigned to populations or stages of custody.
C. *Consolidating regionally* — combining under-used facilities across county lines or within agencies.
D. *Consolidating reentry functions and management* — aligning the agencies responsible for people after release.

For each alternative, the discussion below describes its key features, its potential benefits, and its potential challenges, consistent with the charge to consider the positive and negative impacts of each.

A. Consolidating and Coordinating Management

The first category of alternatives addresses who manages and oversees the system. The three alternatives in this category lie along a spectrum. At one end, every existing agency and elected sheriff remains in place and works more closely together. At the other, custodial operations are unified under a single state structure. Between them is a state oversight board that would set standards and control capacity while leaving day-to-day operations with the existing agencies.

Alternative A-1: Strengthened coordination and standards-setting within the current structure

This alternative would retain every agency and every elected sheriff but require them to function as a unified system. Its principal elements would include:

- *A standing coordinating council.* The council would include the DOC, the sheriffs, the Massachusetts Sheriffs' Association (MSA), the Parole Board, Probation and the OCC, and EOPSS. It would adopt common definitions and shared data sets; jointly purchase health care, food, technology, and other services; and conduct joint staff training under common personnel standards.
- *Behavioral health standards.* The council would set common standards for mental health and substance use treatment across facilities.
- This alternative most directly advances regional collaboration and the preservation of local facilities and existing investments. It does less to address the cost of operating facilities below capacity.

Potential benefits.

- *Cost effective and quick.* This reorganization would be relatively low cost, and could begin quickly, where certain elements and positions are already functioning, albeit without explicit coordination.
- *Lowers costs.* Bulk purchasing of services through standardization of procurement and practices could lower costs. Standardization would also support consistent contract oversight using common measures and outcomes.
- *Better data.* Shared data would allow the Legislature to compare costs, outcomes, and conditions facility by facility. This would support informed decision-making regarding state budget priorities and policy.
- *Local connections.* Retaining elected sheriffs would preserve local control and the community ties that sheriffs have built.

Potential challenges.

- *Conflicting interests.* A coordinating council without binding authority depends on voluntary cooperation by all participants. Where reporting structures vary, interests of

council members could be disparate enough to impact the consensus that is needed for effective coordination.

- *Continued costs of under-utilized facilities.* The alternative does not close beds or right-size capacity within facilities that are currently not operating at capacity, so the high cost of maintaining under-used facilities would continue.
- *Limited past success.* Data-led approaches have had limited success in the past. A prior correctional spending commission determined that it could not build a unified approach to, or formula for, facility budgets because costs vary with facility layouts and populations.

Alternative A-2: A state oversight board

This alternative would build on, and deepen, the sheriff fiscal oversight council introduced by the Legislature in Section 112 of Chapter 137 of the Acts of 2026, the FY2027 General Appropriations Act. through creation of a state Board of Corrections with oversight and accountability functions across both state and county facilities. The Board could be similar comprised to the standards setting body described in A-1 or have different membership based on expertise and role. The Board would:

- set standards for all facilities;
- approve budgets based on capacity and population;
- approve capital projects and facility closures; and
- inspect all state and county facilities.

Sheriffs would remain elected and would continue to run the day-to-day operations of their facilities, and the DOC would continue to run its own, but the governing board would have sufficient remedial powers (perhaps including receivership when warranted) to enforce decision about budget and operations.

Potential benefits.

- *Centralized decision-making.* The Commonwealth would have a single place to decide which beds are needed and to stop funding unused ones. This would include making decisions to close or repurpose facilities that need significant repair such that renovation or reconstruction is not cost-effective and/or is inconsistent with system needs.
- *Consistency.* A single set of standards for safe and humane conditions would apply statewide. This would facilitate consistency of practice and eliminate variation in implementation of standards, such as classification, use of specialized housing units, and development and implementation of behavioral standards for custodies and staff. Concerns about these topics were raised in testimony to the Commission from advocates and individuals with lived experience.
- *Local accountability.* Maintaining the current structure preserves the local accountability of elected sheriffs by retaining their elected status.

Potential challenges.

- *Conflict over disparate interests and needs.* A state board directing elected sheriffs could lead to challenges and conflict, for reasons like those described in A-1. The board's effectiveness depends on who its members are and how authority is shared between the board and elected officials.
- *Another layer in a full system.* The board would add a new layer of oversight to a system that already has many. Effectiveness necessitates clearly defined roles and responsibilities, and expectations for failure to meet accountability standards.
- *Balancing budgets and population changes.* Capacity-based budgets are difficult to set fairly, particularly where there is frequent movement based on changes in population. Those fluctuations are natural and often hard to predict.

Alternative A-3: Full unification of the state corrections system

Under this alternative, a single state agency, or a small number of integrated agencies with consolidated authority, would operate all prisons, jails, and houses of correction, and pre- and post-release functions. Sheriffs would retain other duties, such as civil process, transportation, and court security, and their roles would be redefined. Funding, budgeting, and procurement would be centralized. Accountability would be centralized as well, with greater standardization and oversight of practices across facilities and programs.

This alternative offers the most flexibility to respond to changes in incarceration levels and to reduce the cost of under-used facilities. It does so at the greatest cost to local control, the distinct roles of sheriffs in urban and rural regions, and the community connections the charge asks the Commission to recognize.

Potential benefits.

- *Resource allocation.* Resources could be allocated more evenly across regions. There would be a single entity or small number of agencies assessing the system in its entirety and making decisions through an integrated, comprehensive system of accountability and oversight.
- *Economies of scale.* Centralization promotes economies of scale and makes operations significantly cheaper where fixed infrastructure costs across the whole system are spread across a broader base. Centralization will allow the Commonwealth to maximize public impact per dollar spent in in the system.
- *Builds a strong foundation of trust and fairness.* Consistent leadership and standards establish a strong foundation of fairness, efficacy and public trust. Operating under a unified system minimizes systemic gaps and ensures equitable treatment.
- *Less fragmentation.* The ability to plan for the whole system at once allows for a unified, consistent framework that is not fragmented. This promotes consistency of fiscal and policy decisions and simplifies their implementation.

- *Easier facility closure or reallocation.* A unified structure offers the greatest flexibility to close or repurpose facilities as populations change.

Potential challenges.

- *Slow to meet local needs.* A centralized agency may be slower to meet the diverse needs of local communities. It would require a deliberate framework for identifying and assessing local needs and accounting for this diversity of needs in its decision-making.
- *Disconnected from community.* Centralization removes much of the local, political accountability for jails and houses of correction, along with the community partnerships sheriffs have built. This realignment might jeopardize community programs that sheriffs have developed to respond to short- and long-term community needs, and delay responsiveness when emergent local needs arise.
- *Costly and time consuming.* Transition costs would be high, including merging county and state workforces and addressing union contracts, pension and health systems, and data systems. Such transition would also take several years, and phasing in the changes would be necessary, arguably leading to a further fractured system until implementation was complete.
- *Separation of powers questions.* For the reasons discussed in Alternative D-1 below, shifting responsibilities across branches of government raises separation of powers questions that require further consideration.
- *Executive branch leadership.* State administration turns over every four years, which can create volatility and challenges when leadership changes.
- *Differences between current systems are vast.* As noted in testimony presented and throughout observations during site visits, the organizational culture and staff morale within DOC facilities differ significantly from those found in local jails and houses of correction—a contrast that is palpably felt by both incarcerated individuals and personnel.

B. Merging Facilities and Reallocating Jurisdiction

Where alternatives category A concerns governance, the second considers how facilities themselves are used. The alternatives in this category would treat state and county facilities as parts of a single network, matching people to the facilities best suited to their needs or stage of custody, regardless of which agency operates the building.

Central to the conversation here and in review of regionalization alternatives in C below is the need to assess whether specific facilities are worth keeping, given their age and/or need for renovation. Capital decisions regarding shifting facility use or regionalizing operations must be made in the context of the condition of facilities as a whole – assessing the feasibility of maintaining aging facilities or investing in renovation of outdated facilities – rather than prioritizing individual projects at the request of sheriffs.

Alternative B-1: Statewide bed-sharing and specialized regional units

By working across county boundaries, the state can allocate open beds based on system-wide capacity. Facilities with underutilized space would be repurposed into specialized regional units to address targeted needs. This would eliminate the necessity – as seen in the current system – of having all facilities offer and manage a full spectrum of programs and supports to meet the population's myriad needs.

- *A shared bed pool.* State and county beds would be managed as one pool under agreements between the DOC and the sheriffs, allowing people to be moved to the facility best suited to them based on their needs and classification.
- *Specialized regional centers.* Some facilities could be designated as regional or centralized centers for populations with distinct needs. These could include women; LGBTQIA+ people; people with serious mental illness; people needing medical or substance use care; emerging adults; and veterans.
- *Building on existing strengths.* Designations would recognize the strengths of programming already in place at specific sites. The Commission reviewed several current models of effective regionalization and specialization and heard reports that there was not enough space in programs to accept placements for all individuals who are interested in participating. Notable programs observed include:

    1. The Western Massachusetts Regional Correctional Center in Chicopee, operated by the Hampden County Sheriff's Office, that houses female offenders from multiple western and central Massachusetts counties and allows for the pooling of resources to offer dedicated trauma-informed, gender-responsive medical, educational, and family reunification tracks.
    2. There are several examples of current facilities focused on women. The Western Massachusetts Regional Women's Correction Center provides a continuum of care, from entry to post-release, for resident women. Designed as a regional facility that can serve justice-involved women from central and western Massachusetts counties. Similarly, not all sheriffs' offices in eastern Massachusetts maintain their own women's facilities, so female pretrial and sentenced women are transferred to regional partner HOCs, e.g., Essex County women are housed through an arrangement with Barnstable County. The Middlesex Sheriff's Office Women's Pre-Release Center, is a standalone specialized facility focusing on family reunification, vocational preparation, and electronic monitoring eligibility for women nearing the end of their county sentence.
    3. The Housing Unit for Military Veterans (HUMV) at the Middlesex Sheriff's Office in Billerica, is the first-of-its kind correctional housing unit in Massachusetts for

sentenced and pretrial military veterans. It operates like a modified therapeutic community offering peer support, behavioral therapies, substance abuse treatment, military-style squad structures, and regular coordination with state and federal Veterans Affairs representatives. Incarcerated Veterans Transition Programs (IVTPs), focusing on employment preparation, case management, and coaching for incarcerated and recently released veterans are currently offered at Plymouth, Bristol, and Barnstable County facilities.

4. Emerging adults (ages 18 to 24) are supported in several state and county programs, such as in the People Achieving Change Together (P.A.C.T.) specialized housing and programming unit in Middlesex County. Focused on young adult males ages 18 to 24, participants must enroll in educational classes and engage in cognitive-behavioral and therapeutic groups supported by staff and peer mentors.
5. Specialized vocational programs in several facilities are focused on regional labor market demands and have been developed in partnership with state training initiatives. Some of the key regionally-targeted programs are the Certified Manufacturing Association training program in Bristol County; a landscaping program in Franklin County; and woodworking and construction programs in several counties including Suffolk, Hampshire, Essex, and Barnstable.

- *A bridge to fewer facilities.* Sheriffs raised the possibility of phasing out some facilities over a five-year period that are significantly under capacity or require extensive renovation due to age and condition, including Bristol County, Hampshire County, and Nantucket County. Facility specialization could serve as a bridge toward a future with fewer facilities, allowing some to wind down before closure.

Potential benefits.

- *Builds on existing practice.* The approach builds on existing practice where interagency transfer agreements and bed-sharing are currently being implemented in many facilities. For example, the DOC currently has an agreement for beds at the Plymouth County Correctional Facility: the Western Massachusetts Regional Women's Correctional Center in Hampden County holds most county-sentenced women from the western half of the state; and women sentenced in Barnstable County have been held in Essex County; and sentenced and pretrial populations from Nantucket are held in Barnstable.
- *More targeted programming and care.* Concentrating specialized populations could support more targeted programming and care, consistent with the charge's attention to female and LGBTQ+ populations, and to evidence-based rehabilitative programming for individuals with significant mental illness and substance use disorders.
- *Strengths-based decisions.* A specialization model places people where existing programs are strongest, making better use of existing facilities and investments. It avoids duplication of program types across all facilities, and inconsistency in quality of programming.

Potential challenges.

- *Distance from support networks.* Moving specific populations into regional facilities is likely to place vulnerable people far from family and support networks, in tension with the charge's recognition of family and community connections. As noted above, virtual visits and access to no-cost calls have expanded access to family and support networks and are factors in mitigating these challenges.
- *Geographical distance to courts.* Moving people to the "best bed" could place them farther from their lawyers and from the courts hearing their cases. This option needs to be considered in the context of alternative access to courts and family through virtual hearings and no-cost calls and tablet calling, which is currently available to all in custody.
- *Rate setting.* The DOC and sheriffs may face difficulty agreeing on per-day rates, health care costs, and liability. There may need to be state support for rate setting and establishment of interagency agreements governing these complex terms.
- *Access and equity.* Rights and access to programs can differ depending on which agency holds a person. That is arguably a challenge under the current system, also.

Alternative B-2: Reallocating jurisdiction

This alternative would shift the legal authority and responsibility for managing and housing sentenced individuals, allowing some individualized sentenced to DOC for shorter sentences (e.g., up to five years) to serve their sentences in sheriffs' facilities. This could be combined with encouraging more step-down opportunities such that sheriffs' facilities could hold more people under DOC jurisdiction during their final months of incarceration to support reentry in the community where they will live. As a contrary variant, we could require all sentenced individuals to be housed at DOC facilities.

Potential benefits.

- *Easier facility closure.* Concentrating populations to a greater degree at either the county or state level would create opportunities for facility closures. By pooling state and county populations under a shared placement framework, facilities will be better balanced, eliminating possible over- and under-crowding, allowing for a better understanding of system needs.
- *Community ties for reentry.* If populations were concentrated at the county level, reentry planning could begin in the community where a person will live after release. Stepping down individuals from DOC to county facilities as their sentences wind down helps maintain crucial ties to family and community, local employers, and regional social services.
- *Easy conversion.* Facility design currently allows conversation of a "maximum" facility into a "medium-" or "minimum-" security facility by leaving doors open or unlocked, offering greater access to the campus, creating opportunities for furlough or off-site work.

Potential challenges.

- *Judicial authority and roles.* Systematically changing where sentences are served affects sentencing laws and judges' expectations about their roles and authority and would require broad legislative amendment of sentencing laws, a very fraught process.
- *Classification and security.* Placing state-sentenced people serving long terms in local facilities raises classification and security questions that those facilities may not have been designed to address. This concern may be mitigated by the design features of county houses of correction; Commission members observed that most county housing units are currently designed as maximum-security and can accommodate higher security populations. However, the high security design of county facilities also militates against using them as step-down facilities; some DOC campuses offer greater liberty within the walls, although they are remote from community.
- *Cooperation needed.* Absent legislative restructuring of the sentencing scheme, changes would require agreement between the DOC and the sheriffs, with no single authority in charge. There may need to be some standards-setting and state support in designing interagency agreements, as noted above.
- *Rigidity of the model.* Any legislative change in sentencing policy would be vulnerable to a future finding that the resource allocation was not ideal. The best way to implement reallocation of capacity may generally be through informal collaboration that is more flexible.

C. Consolidating Regionally

The third category addresses the cost of maintaining facilities that operate below capacity, which the Commission's charge identifies as a primary fiscal concern as populations have declined significantly in the last decades. Rather than coordinating the use of existing facilities, as in the preceding categories, this alternative would reduce the number of facilities in operation. The Commission observed during facility tours that larger facilities can offer a larger array of programming and there is a value to accurately scaling facilities.

Alternative C-1: Consolidation of facilities regionally, across levels, or within agencies

Closing underutilized facilities slashes high fixed maintenance costs, allowing for reinvestment of savings into community-based mental health, substance use treatment, and residential reentry services. It also reduces inefficiencies under the current system where specialized housing and program units are spread across numerous sites with low population. This model will centralize staff, clinicians, and program managers, providing high-quality, uniform rehabilitation to a more focused pool of individuals.

- *Regional grouping.* Counties would be grouped so that their populations are housed in fewer, fuller facilities, and under-used facilities would be closed or repurposed.

- *Consolidation within the DOC.* The DOC would continue to close and consolidate facilities within its own system. Among other benefits, this would allow DOC – which faces persistent staffing and retention challenges – to optimize their workforce, concentrating officers at fewer sites, allowing for implementation of more coordinated wellness initiatives.
- *Repurposing.* Closed facilities could be repurposed as reentry or treatment centers, or as other community resources as has already been done in many instances, e.g., in Berkshire County where the old jail now houses community reentry services.
- *Local intake preserved.* Each region would retain at least one intake and pretrial site, maintaining connection to community. Local facilities currently use intensive intake and assessment models and cooperate with local authorities for safe-keep services.
- *Shared governance.* Sheriffs in a region could operate a shared facility under a joint agreement or a regional authority.

In evaluating candidates for consolidation, facility capacity and physical condition are central factors. The Commission notes the recent closures and consolidations in DOC facilities, and facilities being taken offline as they await maintenance. See Mass. Special Comm'n on Corr. Consolidation & Collaboration, Presentation by Adam Bakke, Commissioner, Department of Capital Asset Management & Maintenance. (DCAMM): State Correctional Portfolio and Capital Needs (Oct. 17, 2025) [https://malegislature.gov/Reports/27614/Commission%20Baacke%20Presentation%2010.17.25%20.pdf] and the Massachusetts Sheriffs' Association Operational Capacity Report, January 1, 2026 - June 30, 2026. The Commission also notes that certain facilities are near one another and impacts of regionalization would be lessened, e.g., Hampshire and Hampden; , Bristol and Plymouth.. Additionally, regionalization is already in place through partnership models where custody changes based on status and need, including regionalization for women in custody and for individuals in protective custody whose safety requires transfer to another facility or across counties.

Since 2018, custodies' access to tablets and the availability of no cost calls has broadened the ability of individuals to stay in contact with family and have access to needed resources, regardless of location. The ease of this communication, and the expanded use of technology to support access to court proceedings and attorneys, has reduced the urgency of housing people in facilities close to home and courts.

Potential benefits.

- *Reduces empty beds.* Directly addresses the approximately 47% capacity rate in county facilities. (See Operational Capacity Report at p. 3). The current capacity situation leaves some facilities underutilized.
- *Programs and staffing.* Larger facilities can support fuller programming and more complete medical and mental health staffing to meet population needs. An example of a

successful program in a larger facility that has mitigated costs is the Middlesex Regional Mental Health Stabilization Unit, developed through community partnership to provide onsite medical and substance abuse stabilization and treatment to reduce the need for costly off-site transportation and support for acute, forensic services at Bridgewater State Hospital.

- *Sheriffs' roles.* Sheriffs would remain the operators of the local facilities that would remain open under regionalization, continuing their long history of corrections and community engagement.
- *Precedent for closure.* The DOC has successfully closed facilities in the past, providing precedent for successful facility closure and consolidation.
- *Mitigates impact of current staffing challenges.* Agencies report significant challenges in recruiting and retaining staff. Through consolidation, staffing needs would change, likely mitigating these current challenges.

Potential challenges.

- *Geographic distance.* Closing a county facility means longer travel for visiting families, defense attorneys, and police and court transport, especially in rural western counties. The benefits of using technology to support remote participation and family contact, and reduce transportation costs, would mitigate but not eliminate this burden.
- *Unclear accountability.* Sheriffs are elected by county. A single facility serving several counties blurs lines of accountability. There is not direct precedent for multiple sheriffs operating a single facility.
- *Staffing and labor.* Staff are public employees with collective bargaining rights under M.G.L. c. 150E. Closures and transfers would require bargaining and may result in layoffs. There may also be challenges in retaining staff reassigned to other facilities under a regionalization model.

D. Consolidating Reentry Functions and Management

The final category turns from facilities to what happens after release. The charge asks the Commission to recognize the value of community-integrated reentry support, the role of community organizations, and the importance of addressing in reentry the social determinants of incarceration and recidivism. Today, responsibility for people leaving custody is spread across the Parole Board, Probation and the OCC, the DOC, and the sheriffs. One current barrier to reentry, as observed and shared through testimony and discussions during site visits, is the autonomous and disconnected nature of reentry programs spread across multiple agencies.

Alternative D-1: Unified reentry and community supervision

This alternative would consolidate the work that happens after release. It could take either of two forms, which could also be sequenced:

1. *Binding cooperative agreements* among the Parole Board, Probation and the OCC, the DOC, and the sheriffs. These would provide for a single reentry plan for each person, shared case records, and shared community centers, potentially as a step toward a single community-supervision agency.
2. *Structural consolidation* of supervisory and reentry functions into a single executive branch agency responsible for implementation and oversight.

Potential benefits.

- *Better coordination and less fragmentation.* Consolidation of reentry functions would eliminate the system's current fragmentation, and lead to better coordination of pre- and post-release reentry programming and services. Standardization of participant eligibility requirements and programming across sites will help ensure continuity of support that is impacted under the current system where DOC, sheriffs, Probation, the Parole Board, OCC and judges have distinct and disconnected responsibilities.
- *Single plan.* A single plan would follow each person from custody into the community, reducing gaps in services and supervision and supporting fidelity of reentry practice.
- *Expanded community support.* Community Justice Support Centers and sheriffs' reentry programs could serve everyone in a region, rather than the caseload of a single agency. Some counties, such as Berkshire, Hampshire, and Norfolk, have developed extensive, strong models of community-integrated reentry infrastructure that illustrate the potential of community-based support hubs that connect justice-involved people to existing housing, employment, health, and other social service resources. The strongest models also demonstrate that reentry need not be limited to people currently on parole or probation. These resources can function as a community access point, recognizing that successful reentry depends partly on strengthening the communities to which people return.
- *Data reporting and use.* Currently, participation and outcome data regarding reentry is limited, such that a complete understanding of the effectiveness of reentry programs and support is incomplete. Consolidation of these functions will allow for standardization through the development of common data set and assessment benchmarks and metrics to track outcomes and lead to better policy making and budget decisions.

Potential challenges.

- *Separation of powers.* The OCC and Probation are currently in the judicial branch. Moving them into the executive branch raises separation of powers questions. The roles of judges and the executive branch in reentry is an issue for further consideration.
- *Blurring lines.* Folding parole supervision into a corrections agency could blur the Parole Board's independence in release decisions.
- *Costly and time consuming.* Merging agencies with different staffing classifications, unions, and data systems across branches is costly and can take years.

The cooperative-agreement form can address most of these structural challenges, but like Alternative A-1, it would depend on sustained voluntary cooperation.

Summary of Alternatives

The table below summarizes the seven alternatives. As noted above, they are not mutually exclusive and may be combined, phased, or pursued as steps toward broader change.

Table 5: Summary of Alternatives

Alternative	What would change	Who operates facilities	Principal benefit	Principal challenge
A-1. Strengthened coordination	Coordinating council, shared data, joint purchasing and training	Unchanged	Low cost; quick to start; preserves local control	Voluntary; does not reduce excess capacity
A-2. State oversight board	Board sets standards, approves budgets, capital projects and closures, inspects facilities	Unchanged	Single point of decision on needed beds; statewide standards	Potential conflict with elected sheriffs; added oversight layer
A-3. Full unification	One state agency (or more) runs all secure facilities	State agency	Economies of scale; greatest flexibility to close or repurpose	Loss of local accountability; high transition costs; constitutional questions
B-1. Bed-sharing and specialized units	Shared bed pool; regional centers for specific populations	Unchanged	Builds on existing practice and program strengths	Distance from family, counsel, and courts; rate and liability disputes
B-2. Reallocating jurisdiction	Facilities assigned by sentence or stage	Unchanged	Facilities used for what they do best; reentry begins locally	Sentencing-law and classification issues; frequent transfers

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C-1. Regional consolidation	Fewer, fuller facilities; closures and repurposing	Sheriffs, individually or jointly, and the DOC	Directly addresses empty beds; fuller programming and staffing	Longer travel in rural areas; blurred accountability; collective bargaining
D-1. Unified reentry and supervision	Cooperative agreements or a single supervision agency	Not applicable	One reentry plan follows each person	Separation of powers; Parole Board independence; merger costs

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Draft Summary of the November 9, 2026 Meeting of the Special Legislative Commission on Correctional Consolidation and Collaboration

Attendance:
Senator Brownsberger, co-chair
Representative Hunt, co-chair
Representative Muradian
Representative Reyes
Sheriff Cocchi
Sheriff MacDonald
Commissioner Bob Gittens
Commissioner Ifill's designee: Brian Mirasolo, Acting 1st Deputy Commissioner of Probation
Under Secretary Peck, virtual
Secretary Cabral, virtual
Sheriff Cahillane, virtual
Commissioner Dupuis, virtual
Commissioner Jean- Jacques, virtual
Commissioner Rini, virtual

The Special Commission on Correctional Consolidation and Collaboration met on November 9, 2026, under the leadership of Co-Chairs Representative Dan Hunt and Senator Will Brownsberger to review and discuss a draft report outlining alternatives for the organization and oversight of Massachusetts' correctional system. The meeting followed approximately 18 months of commission meetings, facility tours, and stakeholder discussions. The co-chairs opened by reviewing the commission's formal charge: to identify alternatives for distributing correctional oversight and facility responsibilities and assess the potential advantages and disadvantages of each. They clarified that the commission was not required to select a single model or reach unanimous agreement, and that the final report would reflect areas of consensus as well as differing perspectives. Approval of the previous meeting minutes was postponed because they had not yet been circulated.

The draft report organized potential alternatives into three broad categories: changes to systemwide correctional management and coordination; consolidation of facilities or redistribution of jurisdiction and responsibilities; and regional approaches to correctional operations. Members generally praised the draft, while Sheriff Nicholas Cocchi raised concerns about the sheriffs' lack of voting representation despite the report's significant implications for their operations. He also questioned whether the facility review process was sufficiently balanced, noting that all county sheriff facilities had been toured but not all Department of Correction (DOC) or Office of Community Corrections (OCC) facilities. The co-chairs acknowledged these concerns and explained the rationale for the extensive

sheriff facility tours. Sheriff Joseph McDonald expressed support for the process, describing it as fair and thorough.

The discussion then turned to the potential for correctional consolidation and the use of existing facility capacity. Senator Brownsberger emphasized that the commission was not proposing to place all county correctional operations under DOC management, given the different missions, populations, and operating environments of the DOC and county sheriffs. He cautioned that excess bed capacity should not automatically lead to facility closures, since additional space can support specialized programming and housing for veterans, young adults, individuals with serious mental illness, and people receiving substance use treatment. He also stressed that sheriff departments provide important local services beyond incarceration, including 911 response, forensic services, and law enforcement support, which should be considered when evaluating their responsibilities and budgets.

Members subsequently explored opportunities to expand collaboration with other state agencies. Commissioner David Rini proposed examining whether the Department of Mental Health (DMH) could assume greater responsibility for individuals with chronic and serious mental health needs, whether the Department of Public Health (DPH) could play a larger role in caring for elderly and medically fragile individuals, and whether the Department of Youth Services (DYS) could collaborate more closely with adult correctional facilities in serving emerging adults. These proposals would require further assessment, policy and jurisdictional changes, and coordination among agencies. Sheriff Cocchi supported exploring these options but emphasized that correctional facilities would still need the capacity to provide mental health, substance use, and medical services to individuals who remain in custody. He reported that approximately 78% of individuals in his facility had some level of self-reported mental health need. Sheriff McDonald similarly emphasized that individuals should not be incarcerated simply because of mental illness or substance use disorders, while recognizing that rebuilding community-based treatment infrastructure would require substantial investment.

A substantial portion of the meeting focused on improving rehabilitation and reentry services through stronger statewide coordination. Commissioner Harry Jean Jacques proposed a community-based partnership framework connecting the DOC, county sheriffs, parole and probation, community organizations, and other stakeholders. He recommended establishing shared standards and improving coordination, evaluating program outcomes, reinvesting verified savings into housing, education, workforce development, and behavioral health services, and

including individuals with lived experience in oversight and decision-making. Members distinguished between consolidating reentry services under one agency and establishing a statewide coordination structure that would promote data sharing, common practices, accountability, and collaboration while allowing agencies to retain their individual responsibilities. Senator Brownsberger suggested adding this coordination approach as a separate alternative in the report.

Secretary Andrea Cabral strongly advocated for a permanent, mandated statewide rehabilitation and reentry framework involving executive, legislative, and judicial representatives, as well as the DOC, sheriffs, parole and probation, DMH, DYS, and community-based organizations. She argued that previous efforts had struggled to produce lasting results because coordination and accountability were not sufficiently established. She encouraged the commission to consider the long-term return on investment of rehabilitation, behavioral health, education, housing, and reentry services rather than focusing solely on immediate correctional costs. Other members supported stronger statewide coordination but cautioned that the structure should preserve successful local programs and avoid limiting local innovation. Sheriff Cocchi also emphasized the importance of transparency, accountability, professional expertise, and meaningful participation by people with lived experience.

Undersecretary Andrew Peck raised an additional issue concerning public construction procurement requirements and their potential effect on correctional facility construction and capital improvement costs. Referencing proposed changes to DCAMM project procurement thresholds, he suggested that similar considerations could be explored for correctional projects, including security bond requirements, and offered to provide potential legislative language for the report or an individual statement.

In closing, the co-chairs outlined the report's next steps and reiterated that members would have the opportunity to submit individual statements, whether or not they agreed with the chairs' proposed consensus observations. Commission staff will revise the alternatives to incorporate potential partnerships with DMH, DPH, and DYS, add a distinct statewide reentry coordination option, and strengthen the discussion of a unified rehabilitation and reentry framework. Secretary Cabral will provide further detail on her proposal, Undersecretary Peck will submit procurement-related language, and all commission members were asked to provide comments before the following Monday. The revised alternatives document and introductory section are expected to be circulated later in the week, with adoption of the report's principal sections targeted for the following week and

final completion anticipated between November 16 and 30. The previous meeting minutes will also be presented for approval at the next meeting.

Overall, the discussion moved beyond facility consolidation alone and increasingly emphasized preserving the distinct roles of the DOC and county sheriffs while strengthening coordination across state agencies, expanding access to appropriate mental health and medical services, and building a more accountable statewide rehabilitation and reentry system. These themes will inform the revisions to the commission's draft report; they represent emerging areas of agreement and direction rather than final adopted policy recommendations.

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