Whatcom County Jail Population Forecast Analysis

developed for

WHATCOM COUNTY HEALTH AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

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stv

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PASQUO PLANNERS

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INTRODUCTION

The Whatcom County Jail is operated by the Whatcom County Sheriff's Office in Bellingham, Washington. The facility has been faced with capacity challenges nearly throughout its operational life. Due to overcrowding, booking restrictions have been in place at various times since 2015, requiring arrestees to be booked and released from custody immediately. The County seeks guidance regarding appropriate options for consideration regarding the facility as well as an idea of future population scenarios.

Goal

The primary goal of the Whatcom County Jail Population Forecast Analysis is to determine the projected bed need for the jail facility through the year 2050 to support public policy decision-making regarding a future direction for the jail. Our main statistical analysis is based on a series of large data extracts covering intakes, the previous population of the jail, the anticipated size of the overall Whatcom County population, time in custody, criminal court case processing, and other relevant variables. The research effort culminates in a forecast of the future size of the jail's population, reflecting both a continuation of current policies and practices as well as the impact of potential changes to the Whatcom County criminal justice system.

Methodology

Three main tasks were taken to execute this study.

First, we acquired multiple comprehensive data extracts from the Whatcom County Jail which included key information about every single individual charged with an offense between January 2019 and October 2025. These data extracts enabled an in-depth analysis of key custody variables built upon a forensic reconstruction of the jail's population over time.

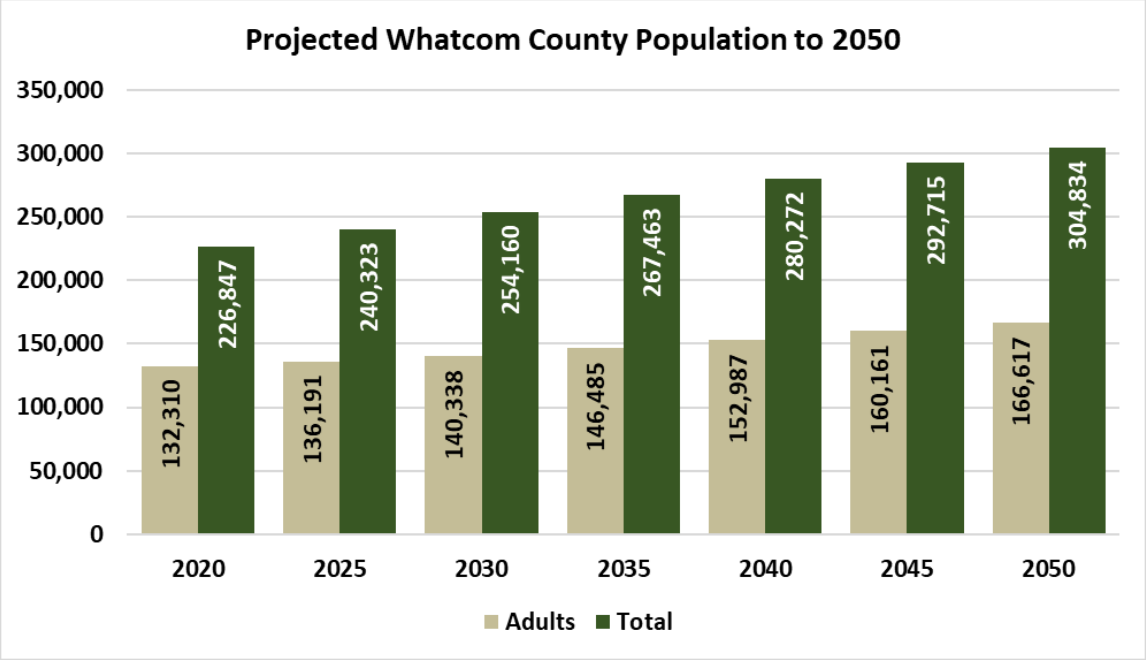
Second, criminal court case processing times were calculated to provide a predictor variable for lengths of stay at the jail.

Third, the results of the statistical analyses were combined into multiple time series forecasts using Autoregressive Integrated Moving Average (ARIMA) methods.

Whatcom County Population

To help set the context for the analysis, it is best to have a clear sense of the future population size of Whatcom County. To do this, the research team acquired data from the Washington State Office of Financial Management, Forecasting & Research Division[1]. Generally speaking, population growth (or the opposite) has a somewhat muted impact on a given jail's population. For the most part, there is not a direct linear correlation between population growth and jail population forecasts. There simply is no set proportion of new citizens that can be calculated or translated into jail population numbers. However, in our experience, there is enough of an impact that population growth needs to be considered when building statistical forecasts of future jail population levels. Candidly, having more residents in a jurisdiction can be expected to increase the number of arrests and bookings in that jurisdiction. The state data indicate that the county's total population is expected to increase 27% between 2025 and 2050. However, the adult population of the county is expected to grow by 22%. The adult population is a more precise predictor of arrests and bookings because it excludes children and the elderly. Figure 1 demonstrates the expected future size of the Whatcom County total population as well as the adult population.

Figure 1. Projected Whatcom County Population, 2020 - 2050



We must reiterate that while the future population of the county is important to consider, there is not a direct relationship with the ultimate size of the jail facility. There is no one-to-one relationship between population growth and jail needs. While population growth does contribute to arrests and bookings, which impact the jail's future population, it is not at all the most important factor.

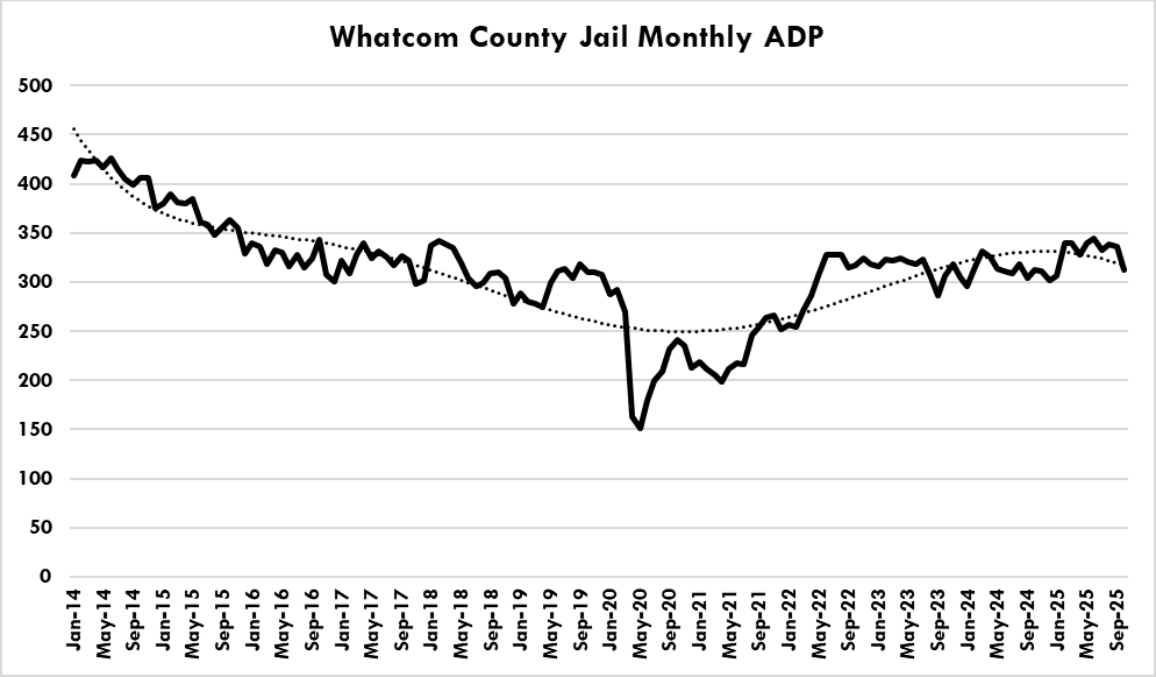
[1] https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/jonathan.norris/viz/2024PopulationForecastDashboard/Dash-HighandDetail/

Whatcom County Jail Population Analysis

The most prominent and important measures that impact the Whatcom County Jail population were employed in a comprehensive set of analyses such as bookings (the number of people booked into the facility), average daily population (ADP), average length of stay (ALOS, a measure of how long, on average, detainees stay in custody), arrest offenses, criminal court case processing, and a profile of the detainee population. To perform our jail population analysis, a significant set of data extractions from the Whatcom County Jail as well as the judiciary was obtained and analyzed. Our intention was to examine every charge for every person with a criminal matter between January 2014, and October 8, 2025, along with demographic and release information.

The research team took the extracted data and forensically reconstructed each day's population during the study's time frame. Figure 2 takes the data from each day and rolls the time series up into months. Normally, jail populations are seasonal, with peak populations occurring at set times of the year (generally Summer months) and low populations at other times of the year (typically Winter months). In Whatcom County's case, the seasonality exists but it is significantly tempered over time by the fact that the demand for jail beds has regularly outstripped supply. Indeed, the Whatcom County Jail has operated with booking restrictions at times in the past. The most prominent feature in Figure 2 is the significant population decrease beginning in Spring 2020 due to the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic. Multiple waves of the pandemic cause the population to rise and fall through 2021. Beginning with the start of 2022, the population rises quickly and returns to pre-pandemic levels, where it has largely remained, with the exception of a small increase during 2025. The 2025 population is about 7% higher than it was in 2024.

Figure 2. Whatcom County Jail Monthly Average Daily Population, 2014 - 2025



Bookings

All jail populations are determined by two factors: The number of people who are booked into the facility and how long those people stay (average length of stay, or ALOS). Figure 3 details the monthly number of bookings (expressed as a daily average in order to more accurately compare months of different lengths)

into the jail. The bookings time series is very similar to the population graph between 2014 and 2020. The number of bookings into the jail declined significantly with the arrival of the first wave of COVID-19. The trend has never returned to pre-pandemic levels, reflecting the fact that a number of lower-level offenses that used to result in jail detention are dealt with in other ways. The level of the bookings trend remained below 10 per day for much of 2021 and 2022, before rising in 2023. Bookings have risen significantly in 2025 (a 24% increase compared to 2024).

FIGURE 3. MONTHLY COMMITMENTS, 2014 – 2025

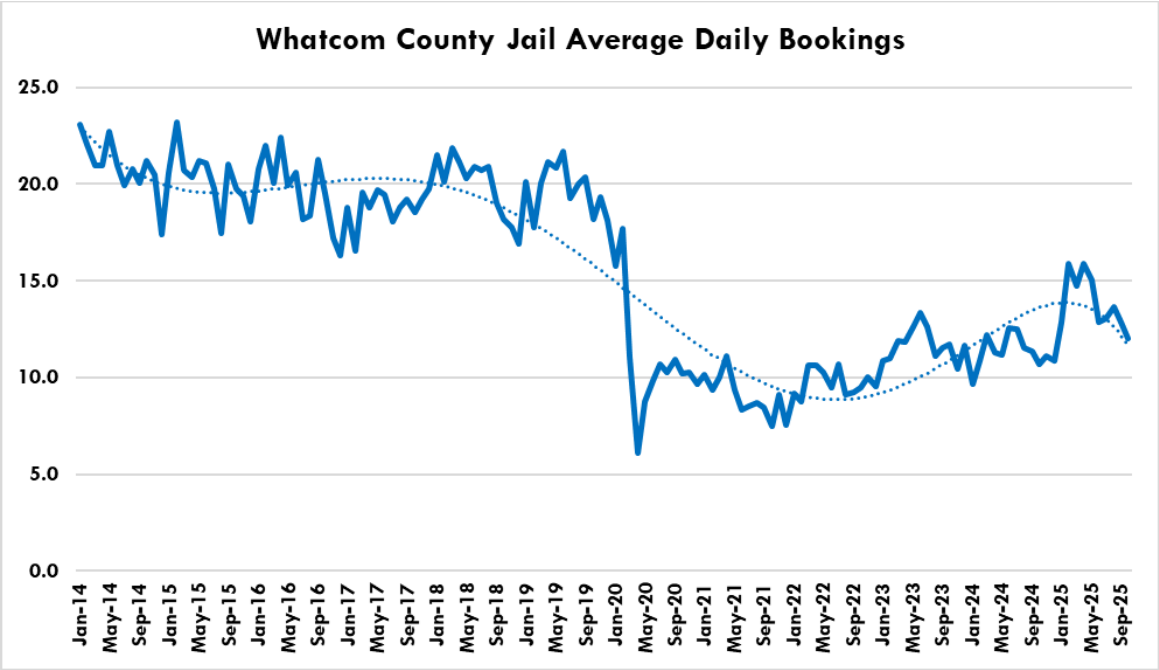


TABLE 1. ANNUAL AVERAGE DAILY BOOKINGS (ADB), 2020 – 2025

Year	ADB	2025 YTD ADB
2020	10.9	28% Larger
2021	9.0	56% Larger
2022	9.8	43% Larger
2023	11.7	19% Larger
2024	11.3	24% Larger
2025	14.0	---

Table 1 above presents the annual average daily booking levels between 2020 and Fall 2025. The daily booking average is currently at its highest level since 2020, something that is easily observed in Figure 3 as well.

Figure 4 plots the ADP time series against the average daily booking time series. There is a relatively weak correlation between the two time series throughout the graph. Notice that the ADP decreases relative to bookings between 2015 and 2019. We know that the only explanation for this seeming disconnect is a reduction in ALOS, something we will address shortly. Immediately following the pandemic, the ADP generally follows the booking trend in terms of shape and dynamics. However, notice that in the chart the ADP time series is now above the booking time series. Again, we will look to ALOS for an explanation.

FIGURE 4. JAIL BOOKINGS VS. ADP, 2014 – 2025

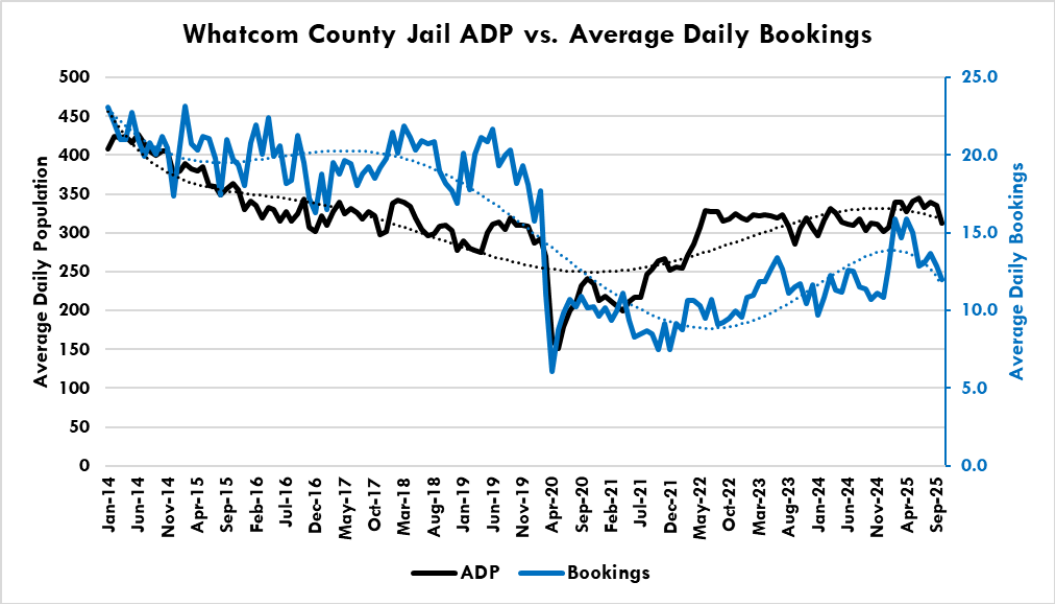
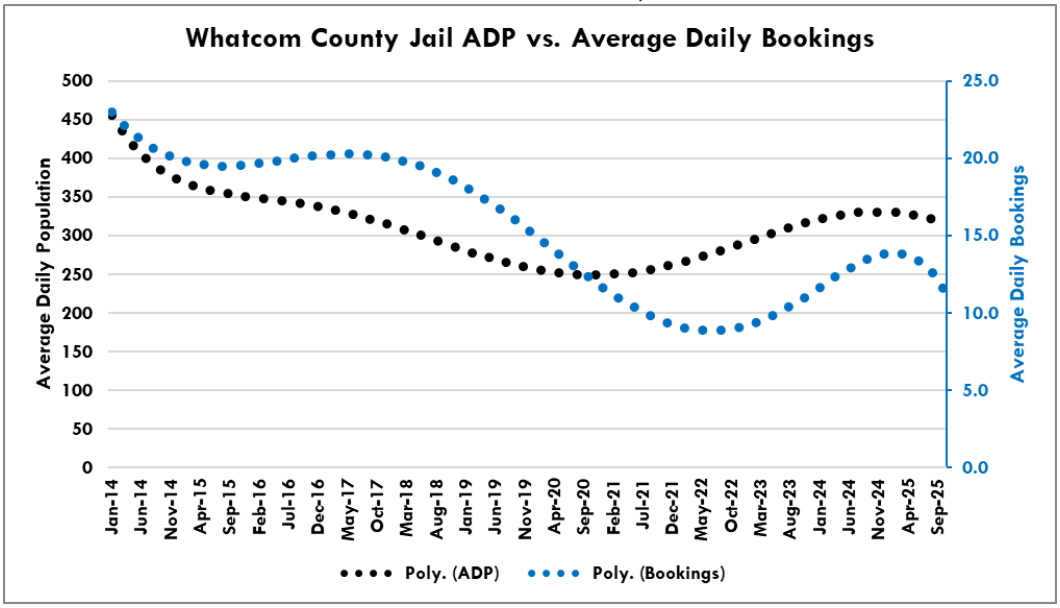


Figure 5 is the same chart, but removes the actual data from the graph, leaving only the polynomial trend lines. By removing the noise from the graph, the relationship between bookings and the jail's ADP is much more evident.

FIGURE 5. BOOKING TREND VS. ADP TREND, 2014 – 2025



Commitments By Charge

The research team also examined what the offense was that necessitated each intake during the period of our analysis. Because most people are booked with more than one offense, to make comprehending the nature of the offenses involved across the population easier, it is necessary to determine the most serious offense of each person. The data extracts produced by the Whatcom County Jail contained every single charge for every single person charged between 2014 and October 2025. These extracts were analyzed, and the charge information was reclassified into multiple categories. The reclassification was done to

regroup detainees by the most serious charge for each detainee. The categories used to make the final determination are (presented in order of seriousness):

- Violent
- Sex Offenses
- Offenses vs People
- Weapons
- Burglary
- Theft/Fraud
- Drugs
- Offenses Against the Administration of Government
- DUI
- Public Order
- Other
- Alcohol
- Traffic
- Supervision/Temporary Release Violation
- Hold/Writ

'Offenses vs. People' is defined as crimes such as neglect, endangerment, corruption of minors, harassment, etc.). 'Offenses Against the Administration of Government' is defined as crimes such as Failures to Appear in Court or Resisting Arrest. 'Public Order' offenses include things like Vandalism, Trespassing or Disorderly Conduct. Using the information collected from the large data extract, when a detainee has multiple charges, a primary charge category is assigned according to the priority listed above. The priority listing is premised on the most serious offense having the highest priority. For example, if an arrestee were charged with a DUI and a violent offense, the primary charge category for that person would be violent. Felony charges outrank misdemeanor charges.

Table 2 breaks down the Whatcom County commitments by most serious charge and is sorted by the number of all intakes for 2025. To be clear, the numbers on the table reflect the daily average intakes for each category. The table shows decreases from 2019 nearly across the board. The only 3 categories showing an increase are felony-level offenses.

TABLE 2. BOOKING COMPOSITION BY MOST SERIOUS CHARGE, 2019 – 2025

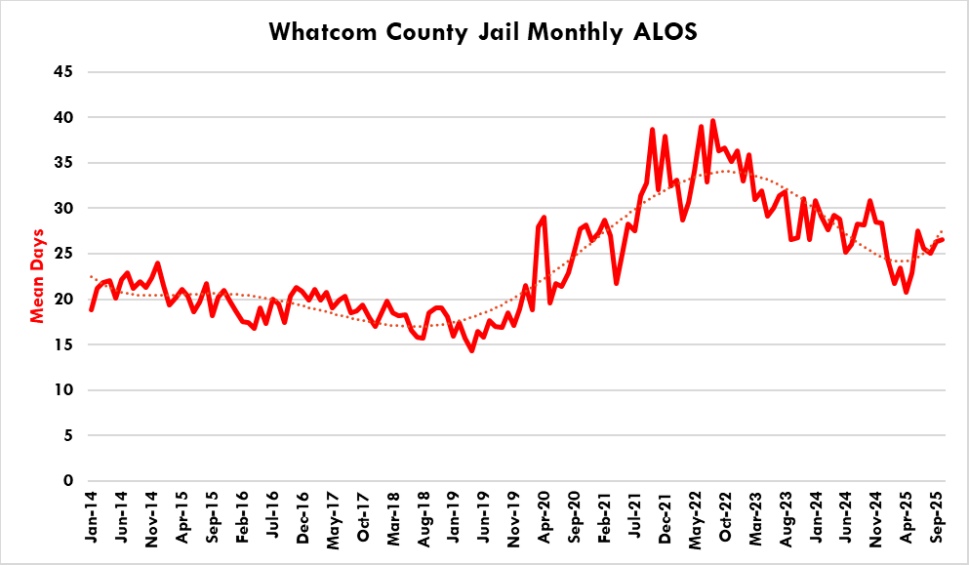
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	Delta From 2019
DUI Misd	3.2	1.8	1.7	1.6	2.5	2.5	2.9	-8.5%
Violent Felony	1.3	1.0	1.1	1.3	1.2	1.2	1.1	-11.2%
Offenses vs Government GMD	1.4	0.3	0.2	0.3	0.5	0.5	1.1	-23.0%
Violent GMD	1.3	0.9	0.9	0.9	1.0	1.1	1.0	-16.7%
Theft/Fraud Felony	0.9	0.8	0.6	0.9	0.9	0.8	0.8	-9.4%
Offenses vs Government Felony	0.7	0.3	0.5	0.6	0.8	0.8	0.8	7.1%
Offenses vs People Felony	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.4	0.3	0.5	0.7	89.4%
Drugs Felony	1.6	0.8	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.6	-60.7%
Offenses vs People GMD	0.8	0.6	0.5	0.5	0.6	0.7	0.6	-18.2%
Traffic Misd	0.7	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.6	-12.8%
Burglary Felony	0.6	0.5	0.4	0.6	0.7	0.7	0.5	-7.4%
Offenses vs Government Misd	0.8	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.4	-46.5%
Hold for Other Agency	1.8	0.3	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.3	-80.9%
Theft/Fraud GMD	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.2	-8.2%
Sex Offense Felony	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.2	11.7%
VOP Misd	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	-41.3%
Everything Else	1.7	0.9	1.9	1.8	2.2	1.4	1.7	-2.6%
Total	**17.9**	**10.9**	**9.0**	**9.8**	**11.7**	**11.3**	**14.0**	**-21.6%**

Average Length of Stay

In addition to commitments, the other predictor of a facility's population is average length of stay (ALOS). ALOS is calculated by taking the average (mean) of how long everyone released during a given time period actually stayed in custody. In addition, for some analyses, it may be advisable to calculate the median of the lengths of stay for all people released during that time period. Typically, an increase in a facility's ALOS will often result in an increase in the facility's population, unless commitments decrease to a point where the population stays the same or decreases. The reverse also holds true. A declining ALOS may result in decreases in a facility's population, assuming that commitments don't increase at the same time at a level that would hold the population steady.

Figure 6 below reflects the monthly mean ALOS in days for the Whatcom County Jail between 2019 and the end of April 2025. The ALOS trend is extremely dynamic, and a check of the data reveals that there are frequent releases of long-staying inmates that tend to sporadically boost the ALOS statistic. Prior to the pandemic, the time series is less dynamic and existed at a lower level. However, as the research team has seen across the country, ALOS grew when the pandemic first struck and the system released more people in an effort to empty the jail to minimize the spread of the disease. In addition, after the pandemic, ALOS rose due to the shift in the nature of the offenses within the population. With comparatively more felony charges in the population and fewer misdemeanors, ALOS naturally rose due to the more complex nature of the criminal cases involved. A decrease in ALOS is observed in 2024 and 2025, due principally to the addition of a new judgeship in Superior Court and an uptick in misdemeanor bookings.

FIGURE 6. WHATCOM COUNTY JAIL ALOS (DAYS), 2014 – 2025



Much like Figures 4 and 5, which compared ADP to bookings, Figures 7 and 8 plot the facility ADP against the mean ALOS. Prior to the pandemic we see a moderate decline in ALOS which helps drive the ADP lower (recall that the bookings time series at this time remained largely stable). During 2020 and 2021 the pandemic had the effect of destabilizing the ALOS trend, as the rate of releases increased during the exact same time that the number of people with lower-level offenses (and resulting shorter stays) declines. On balance, ALOS increases, as does the jail's ADP. Finally, note that by 2025 there is a decrease in ALOS which for the most part is not followed by the ADP trend. Keep in mind that total bookings (as well as misdemeanor bookings) increased in 2025. It must also be noted that the trend lines themselves (Figure

5) smooth out multiple months at a time and there is often a lag when one compares the trend lines to the actual values of the time series in question.

FIGURE 7. WHATCOM COUNTY JAIL ADP VS. ALOS, 2014 – 2025

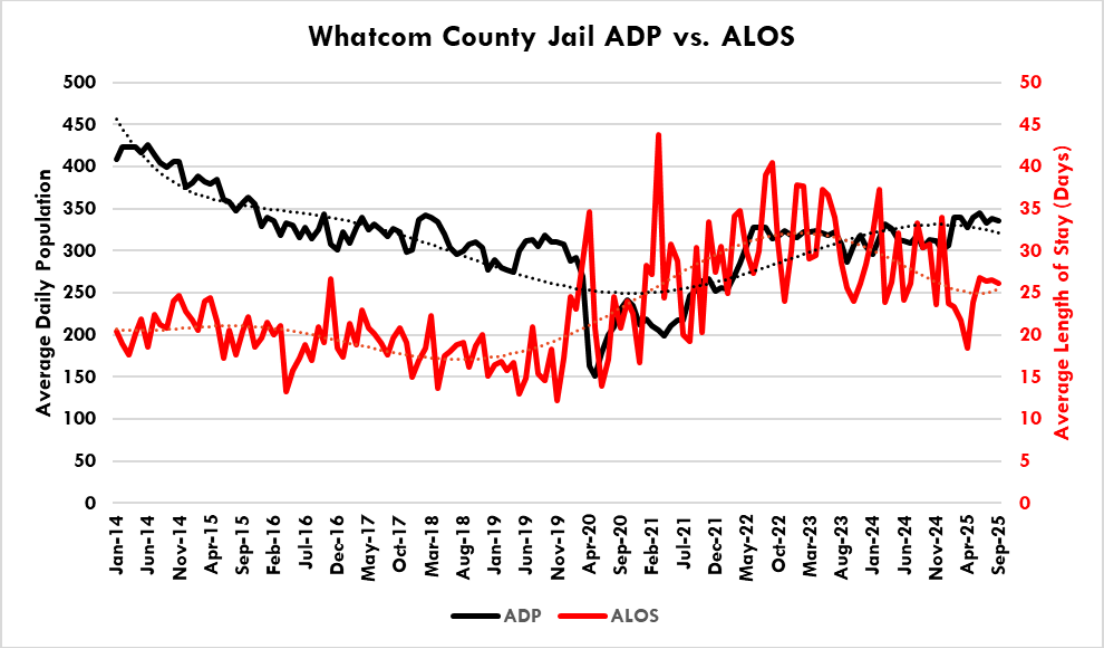


FIGURE 8. WHATCOM COUNTY JAIL ADP TREND VS. ALOS TREND, 2014 – 2025

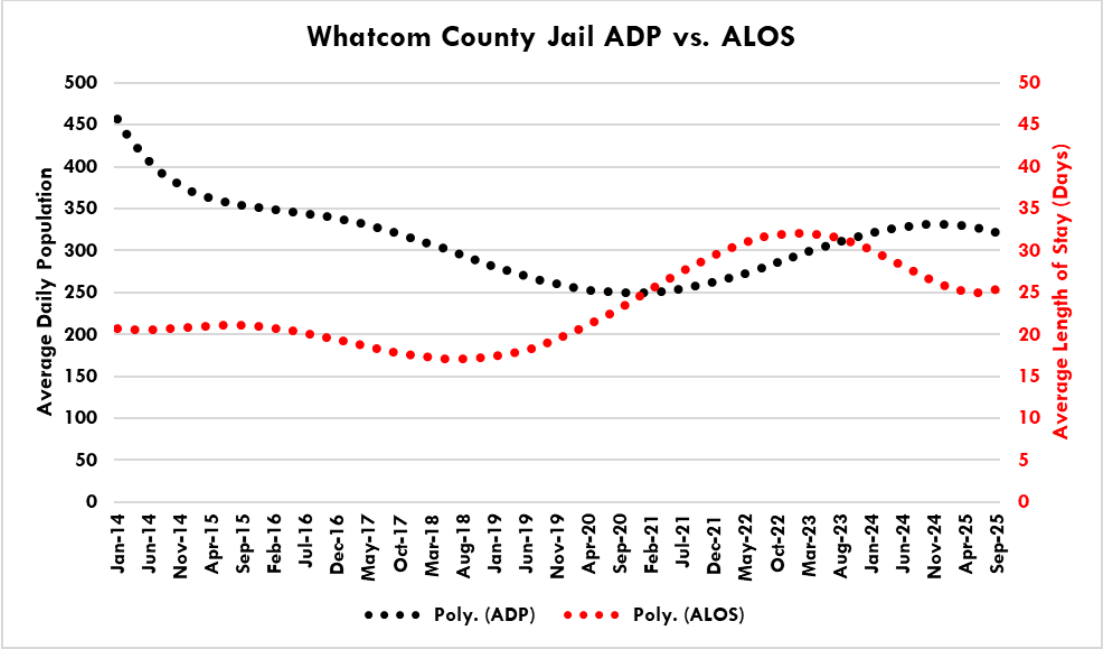


Figure 9 depicts the monthly median ALOS for the Whatcom County Jail. In many instances, the median is an excellent measure of the central tendency of a jail's length of stay patterns because it can avoid the impact of outlying values (such as a concentrated release of individuals to state Department of Corrections facilities). As expected, the median LOS is more stable than the mean (with the obvious exception of Spring 2020). We note that the median decreased after the pandemic but has risen in both 2024 and 2025. The

takeaway from Figure 9 is that the typical person will be released from custody at the end of their second day of custody, and the length of time for that typical person has increased in the last two years. Obviously, somebody charged with a violent or felony offense will stay a longer period of time.

FIGURE 9. WHATCOM COUNTY JAIL MEDIAN LOS (DAYS), 2014 – 2025

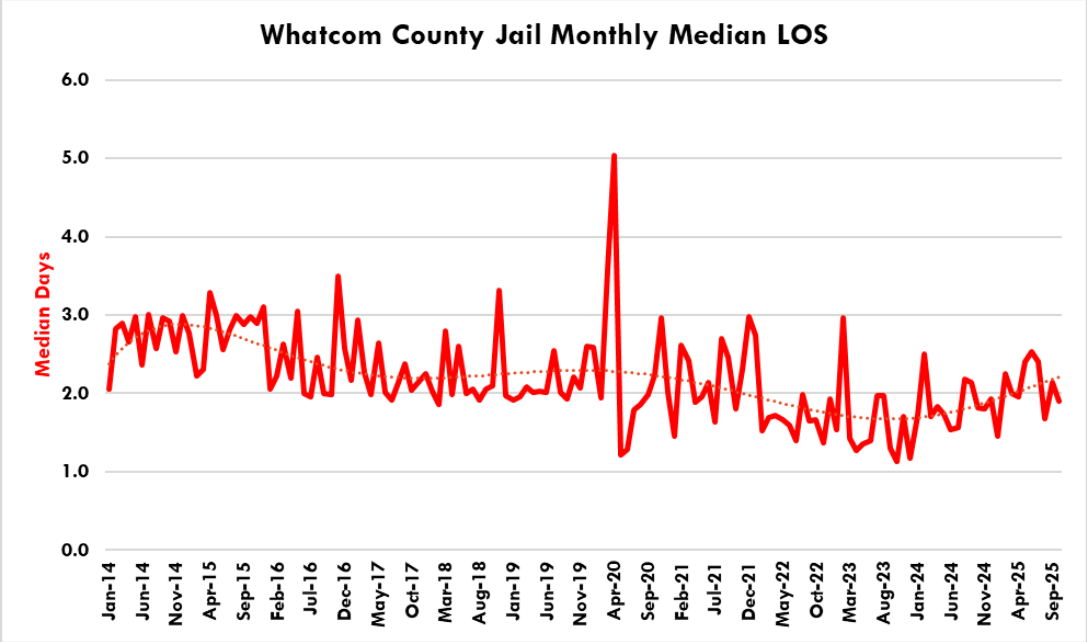


Table 3 provides the annual mean and median ALOS numbers between 2020 and 2025. The median ALOS numbers are somewhat stable when examined from an annual perspective. It is also surprising that the median has increased at a time when misdemeanor admissions are increasing. The mean, however, shows significant increases after the pandemic, with a significant decrease occurring in 2025.

TABLE 3. WHATCOM COUNTY ALOS IN DAYS, 2020 – 2025

Year	ALOS	% Change	Median LOS	% Change
2020	22.9	---	2.1	---
2021	28.2	23%	2.1	1%
2022	31.5	12%	1.7	-18%
2023	31.1	-1%	1.6	-9%
2024	29.3	-6%	1.8	17%
2025	23.9	-18%	2.0	11%

Table 4 provides the ALOS in days by each person's most serious charge category over time. The table is sorted by the population sizes for each charge category in 2025. We see significant growth across most of the categories at the top of the table, as well as a few reductions in the bottom half of the table, which typically represent more minor offenses. As expected, the more serious charges tend to result in longer stays. There was significant growth in the ALOS for people charged with a violent offense in 2023 and 2024, but that number declined significantly in 2025, likely due to a reduction in court case backlog stemming in part from the addition of the Superior Court judgeship.

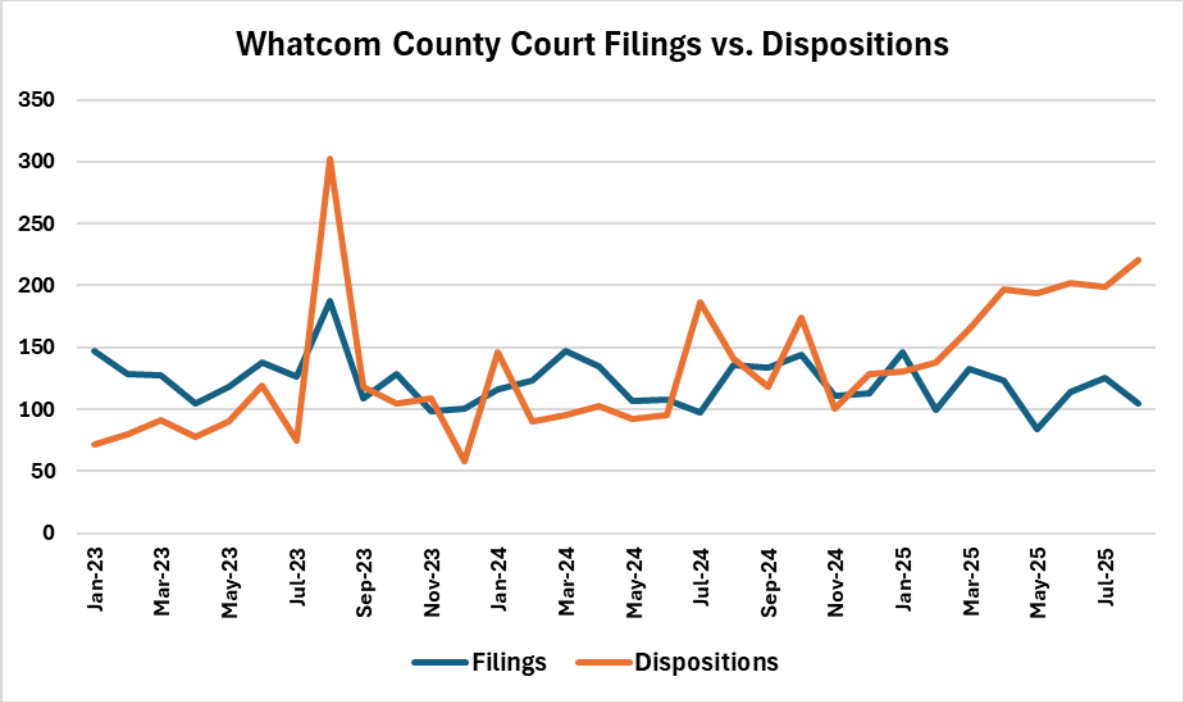
TABLE 4. WHATCOM COUNTY ALOS (IN DAYS) BY MOST SERIOUS CHARGE, 2014 – 2025

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	Delta From 2019
Violent Felony	52.2	66.0	69.3	80.4	103.0	96.8	77.0	47.6%
Theft/Fraud Felony	25.3	24.7	23.4	27.6	33.7	26.8	38.5	52.2%
Offenses vs People Felony	38.9	37.7	51.5	51.8	49.6	41.3	44.7	15.0%
Offenses vs Government Felony	25.5	31.2	20.5	36.7	30.8	28.8	32.0	25.7%
Burglary Felony	33.8	33.5	42.3	44.6	46.3	39.3	41.1	21.8%
Drugs Felony	20.3	15.7	52.0	9.8	48.3	42.0	32.8	61.9%
DUI Misd	7.6	9.1	9.0	8.5	7.1	6.4	6.5	-14.8%
Offenses vs Government GMD	11.5	14.9	18.2	16.0	9.8	15.5	10.4	-9.6%
Sex Offense Felony	46.6	53.9	53.3	93.0	49.5	64.6	45.3	-2.7%
Offenses vs People GMD	10.3	15.3	17.1	23.1	15.8	17.7	19.1	85.5%
Violent GMD	8.4	9.0	12.1	12.4	12.1	11.8	10.4	24.4%
Violation of Probation Misd	22.1	27.5	26.6	27.3	32.1	42.2	29.7	34.1%
Weapons Felony	46.4	40.2	65.4	42.3	55.9	82.9	88.9	91.7%
Traffic Felony	30.7	19.0	16.4	25.0	22.0	20.1	24.1	-21.3%
Theft/Fraud GMD	14.8	11.7	10.2	13.3	16.9	31.1	19.8	34.0%
Total	**16.0**	**22.9**	**28.2**	**31.5**	**31.1**	**29.3**	**23.9**	**49.5%**

Criminal Court Case Processing

The research team was provided a very large dataset detailing some basic criminal court case processing information. This data extract enabled the research team to analyze every criminal case that was active during our study's timeframe. The key unit of analysis was case processing time, operationalized as the time elapsed between case initiation and case disposition. Figure 10 compares the monthly number of disposed cases with the number of cases that were initiated. Beginning in 2025, dispositions outpace filings, a situation that works to reduce or begin to eliminate court case backlog, likely having a positive impact on ALOS.

FIGURE 10. WHATCOM COUNTY MONTHLY COURT FILINGS VS. DISPOSITIONS, 2023 – 2025



Meanwhile, Figure 11 below compares the jail's overall ALOS with the monthly median case processing time between 2022 and late Summer 2025. The reduction in ALOS does not parallel the case processing trend, which was a surprising result. What is likely happening is that the ALOS is being drawn down by a proportional increase in misdemeanant releases. In addition, given what was learned from Figure 10, the courts are successfully working the case backlog. By disposing of older cases, the monthly median case processing time inevitably rises. The expectation is that the case processing time will flatten or begin to decline beginning in 2026, and the trend will behave more like the ALOS trend. Figure 12 removes the noise from the comparison.

FIGURE 11. WHATCOM COUNTY MONTHLY ALOS VS. CASE PROCESSING TIME, 2022 – 2025

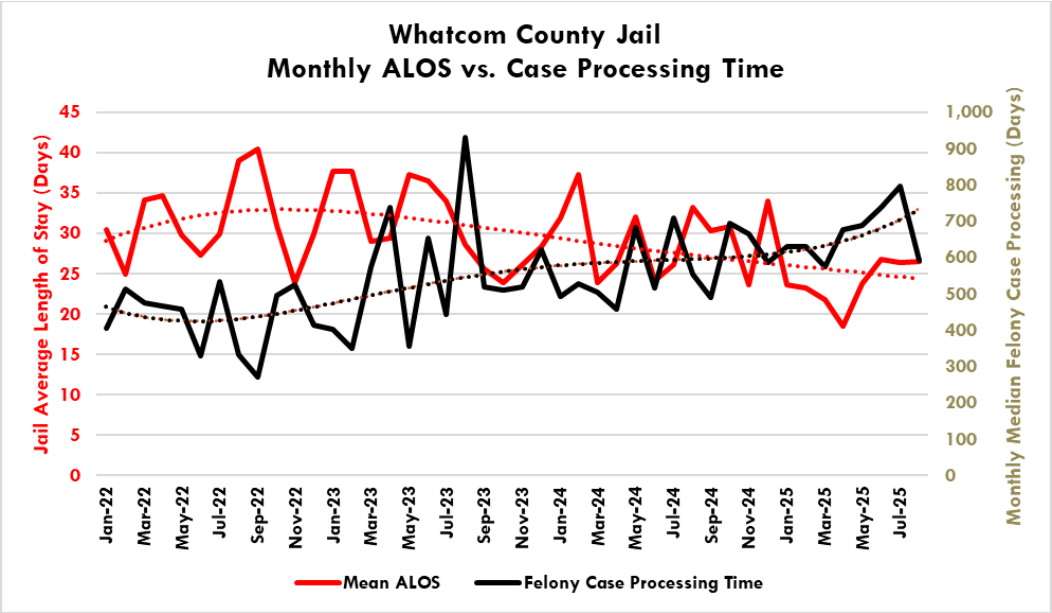
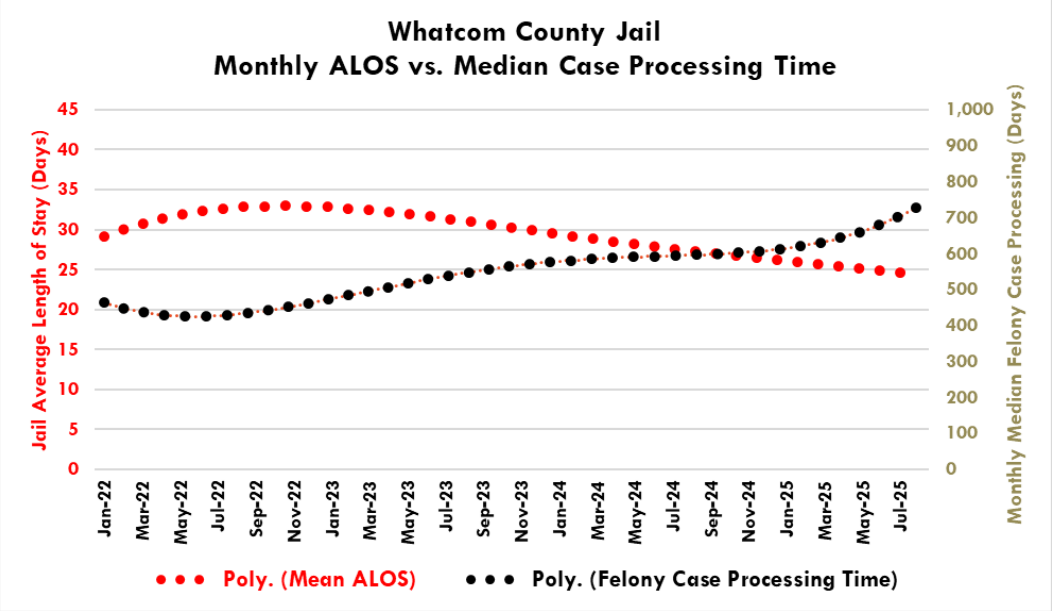


FIGURE 12. WHATCOM COUNTY MONTHLY ALOS VS. CASE PROCESSING TIME, 2014 – 2024 (TRENDS)



Average Daily Population Characteristics

Our data reconstruction made it possible to look at the facility's ADP by a variety of demographic factors. Figures 13 and 14 below give the ADP proportion broken down by gender between 2015 and 2025. The female proportion of ADP is very similar to what we normally encounter across the country. Females comprise around 23% of bookings but only constitute 16% of the ADP. This difference is a result of ALOS differences between males and females (male ALOS is approximately 63% higher due to a number of factors such as more serious offenses and the higher availability of male bedspace within the jail itself). The important lesson from the two charts is that the proportions are relatively stable, but this is likely an artificial relationship given the realities of the jail's female (and overall) capacity. It is quite likely that the female proportion of the population would rise somewhat if new/additional capacity was made available.

FIGURE 13. ANNUAL JAIL POPULATION BY GENDER, 2015 – 2025

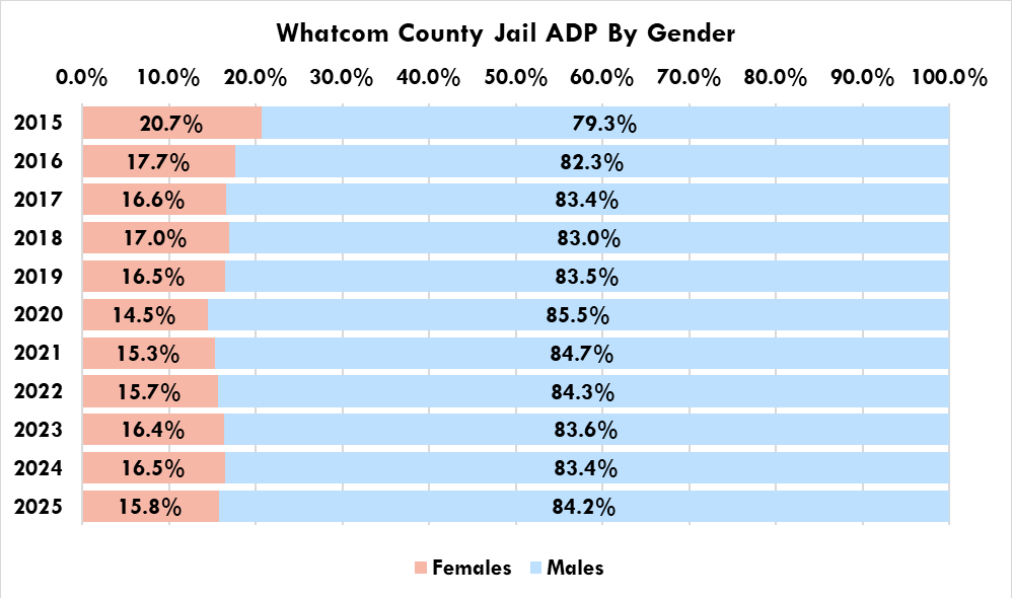
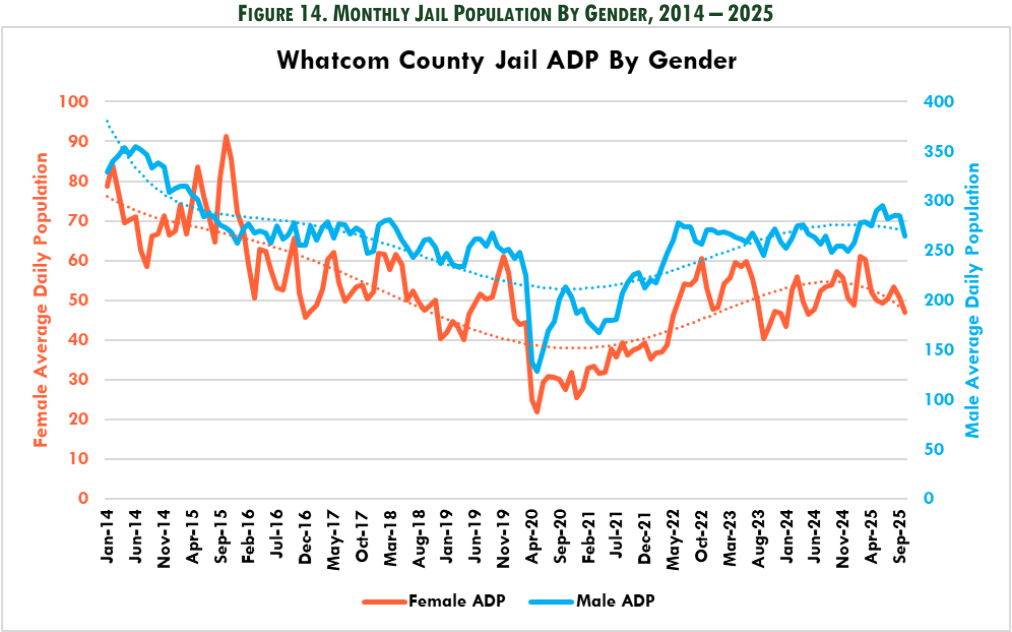


FIGURE 14. MONTHLY JAIL POPULATION BY GENDER, 2014 – 2025



The proportion of the jail's ADP who may have a mental health issue was also analyzed. Initially, the research team relied on a flag in the jail's inmate management system, but it became apparent that use of the flag may lead to some incorrect conclusions. Fortunately, a roster maintained by Lifeline BHRS staff that contained data between September 2023, and August 2025 was acquired. The roster had enough information to reconstruct the portion of the population with mental health and serious mental health issues during the dataset's timeframe. However, the dataset did not have identifying information that would have allowed for a deeper analysis via linkage with the jail's database. At the end of the day, the analysis of this population concludes that 71% of the population had a mental health issue, and 45% of the jail's population had a serious mental health issue. Other facts about this population are impossible to construct, such as gender and charge breakdowns. In an attempt to better estimate the special housing populations, the research team was supplied with over a year's worth of paper rosters. The rosters generally covered the medical, mental health, and restrictive housing populations on a weekly basis through February 2026. The rosters were digitized and the populations are summarized in Table 5, below.

TABLE 5. ESTIMATED SPECIAL HOUSING POPULATION, 2025 - 2026

		Males	Females
Special Housing	Acute MH	12	4
	Subacute MH	28	3
	Special Needs	5	3
	Suicidal	4	1
	Detoxification	5	2
	Medical	11	6
	Restrictive Housing	13	7
	Protective Custody	29	2
	Intake	36	7
General Population	Minimum	69	10
	Medium	26	3
	Maximum	7	2
	Workforce	35	4
Total		**280**	**53**

It was possible to reconstruct the daily population by custody classification level. Table 6 gives the percentages of the population by such levels between 2015 and 2025. Note that the minimum level has rebounded in the last 2 years, which mirrors the proportional rise in the misdemeanor population (see Figure 18). As a result, the proportion of people in the other levels has declined a bit from where they were in 2022 and 2023.

TABLE 6. ANNUAL JAIL POPULATION BY CLASSIFICATION CATEGORY, 2015 – 2025

	Non-Classified	HIGH	MAX	MID	MIN	Grand Total
2015	5.0%	4.1%	5.7%	18.1%	67.1%	100.0%
2016	4.8%	5.2%	5.8%	19.4%	64.8%	100.0%
2017	4.9%	6.0%	6.1%	16.6%	66.4%	100.0%
2018	5.3%	6.8%	5.8%	18.9%	63.2%	100.0%
2019	4.1%	5.3%	5.3%	19.2%	66.1%	100.0%
2020	4.0%	4.9%	5.8%	24.0%	61.4%	100.0%
2021	3.1%	6.3%	7.7%	23.3%	59.6%	100.0%
2022	2.0%	7.4%	5.9%	26.4%	58.4%	100.0%
2023	2.5%	5.7%	4.7%	28.4%	58.7%	100.0%
2024	3.1%	5.2%	3.6%	25.5%	62.6%	100.0%
2025	3.7%	5.8%	4.5%	20.9%	65.1%	100.0%

Figure 15 relates the annual ADP by age cohort. Nationwide, we are measuring relative declines in the group of detainees who are in their 20s, with increases in the proportion of detainees in their 30s and 40s. Whatcom County Jail shows evidence of this shift with more 40- and 50-year-olds in custody. It is

interesting to observe the proportion of 30-year-olds in custody to drop rather unexpectedly in 2025, at the same time there is a larger than expected increase in the proportion of 40-year-olds in custody. The aging of the population mix of the jail could be reflective of the overall active population of the county, but that is somewhat unclear.

FIGURE 15. ANNUAL JAIL POPULATION BY AGE GROUP, 2014 – 2025

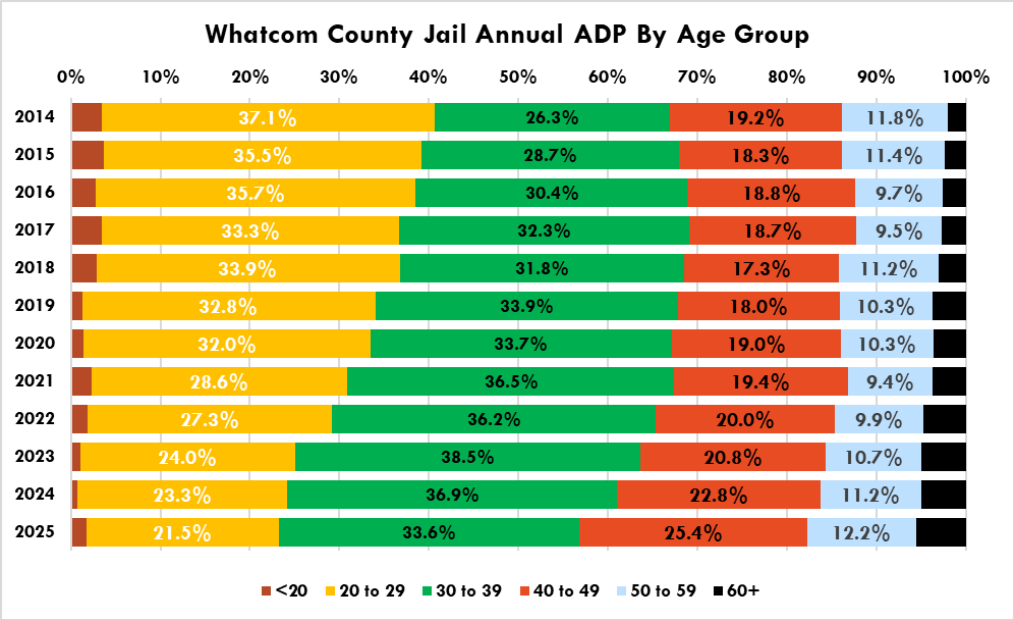
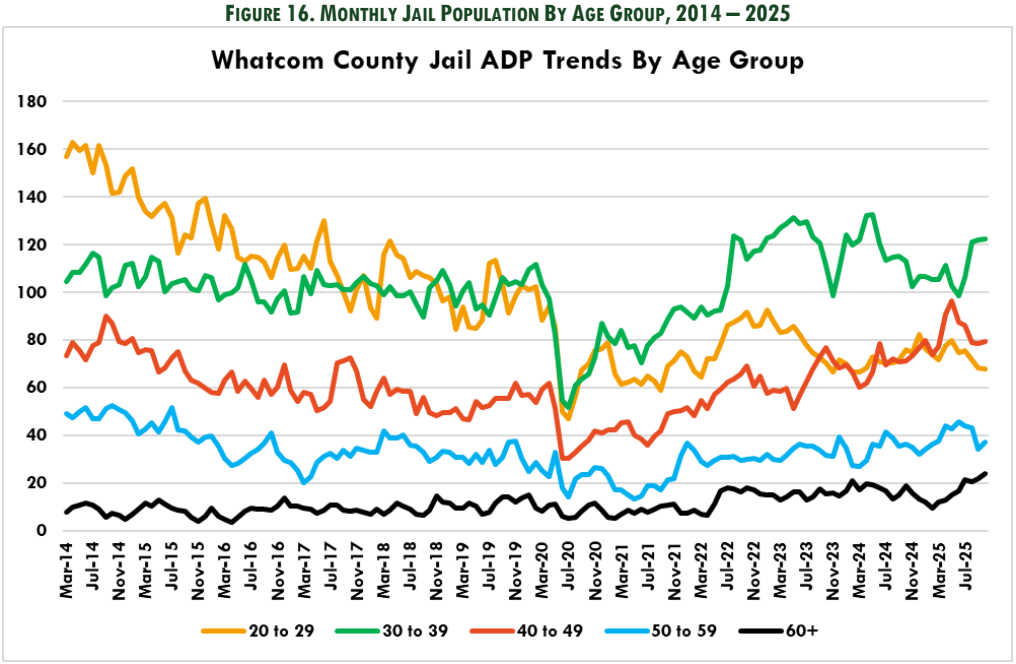


Figure 16 presents the age group data by month. We see a reduction in the yellow line (the 20s cohort) with increases in the green and red lines. The red line (the 40s cohort) has now caught and surpassed the yellow line.

FIGURE 16. MONTHLY JAIL POPULATION BY AGE GROUP, 2014 – 2025



As with bookings and ALOS, the most serious charge analysis was extended to the ADP in Table 7, sorted

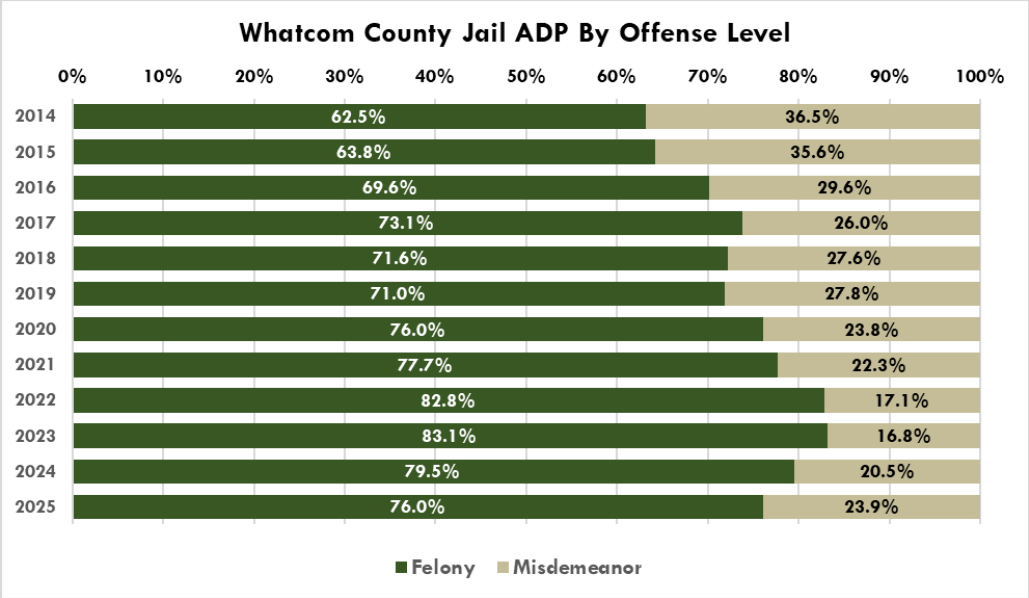
by the 2025 population. The jail is holding people with serious offenses. Violent offenses represent the largest proportion of the population. Felony offenses occupy the first 6 rows of the table. Notice that the most frequently booked charge category (Misdemeanor DUI) slips to the 7th row, due to the shorter LOS for this offense type. In addition, the violent felony component of the population peaked in 2023 and has seen reductions in 2024 and 2025, mirroring what was noted in the earlier discussion of ALOS by charge category.

TABLE 7. AVERAGE DAILY POPULATION BY MOST SERIOUS OFFENSE, 2014 - 2025

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	Delta From 2019
Violent Felony	75.2	70.8	80.0	119.3	122.2	104.4	84.6	12.5%
Theft/Fraud Felony	24.9	16.3	16.9	26.2	27.7	22.2	36.1	45.2%
Offenses vs People Felony	12.4	15.7	15.9	21.6	15.4	20.7	28.9	134.1%
Offenses vs Government Felony	22.3	8.7	12.7	20.8	22.3	24.6	23.4	5.2%
Burglary Felony	18.0	16.9	19.9	30.1	30.5	24.2	21.2	17.7%
Drugs Felony	32.6	15.7	7.4	4.5	6.5	13.5	19.5	-40.3%
DUI Misd	24.2	15.7	16.3	15.0	15.5	16.8	19.0	-21.3%
Offenses vs Government GMD	15.9	4.8	5.2	4.3	5.3	7.6	12.8	-19.0%
Sex Offense Felony	9.4	7.1	9.7	10.7	8.9	12.0	12.3	30.6%
Offenses vs People GMD	7.7	8.8	9.2	12.0	10.4	12.9	12.3	60.3%
Violent GMD	10.5	9.7	9.5	11.8	11.0	12.9	10.9	3.9%
Weapons Felony	6.7	8.5	5.6	7.1	11.0	13.3	9.1	35.7%
Violation of Probation Misd	7.7	6.4	4.8	4.2	5.7	6.9	5.7	-25.9%
Traffic Felony	3.8	1.8	2.5	3.8	3.8	4.0	5.7	48.7%
Theft/Fraud GMD	3.4	0.9	0.7	1.2	1.7	2.3	4.4	30.6%
Everything Else	25.4	14.7	13.8	11.0	16.7	14.2	21.4	-15.7%
Total	**299.9**	**222.5**	**230.2**	**303.5**	**314.6**	**312.5**	**327.4**	**9.2%**

Figure 17 below depicts the ADP proportions of felony and misdemeanor-charged people between 2014 and 2025. After the pandemic, the proportion of misdemeanors was significantly reduced, but the proportion has grown in 2024 and 2025. The current proportion largely matches what existed in 2020. This is a somewhat surprising result and is a phenomenon that the research team has only rarely encountered in recent years. The national trend seems to be a continuously increasing proportion of felony-charged people.

FIGURE 17. ANNUAL JAIL POPULATION BY OFFENSE LEVEL, 2014 – 2025



Figures 18 and 19 provide the monthly ADP, bookings, and ALOS of people who have a violent felony charge. There are several important takeaways from these charts. First, note that during the pandemic there is no reduction in the violent felony ADP because these people could not be safely and responsibly released from custody. Second, the bookings trend has been steadily rising through time, with a small decline in 2025. Third, the ADP and ALOS trends are highly correlated. The reduction in ALOS for the violent felony segment has resulted in a reduction in the ADP as the courts have picked up momentum in reducing the case backlog.

FIGURE 18. VIOLENT FELONY-CHARGED ADP VS. BOOKINGS AND ALOS, 2014 – 2025

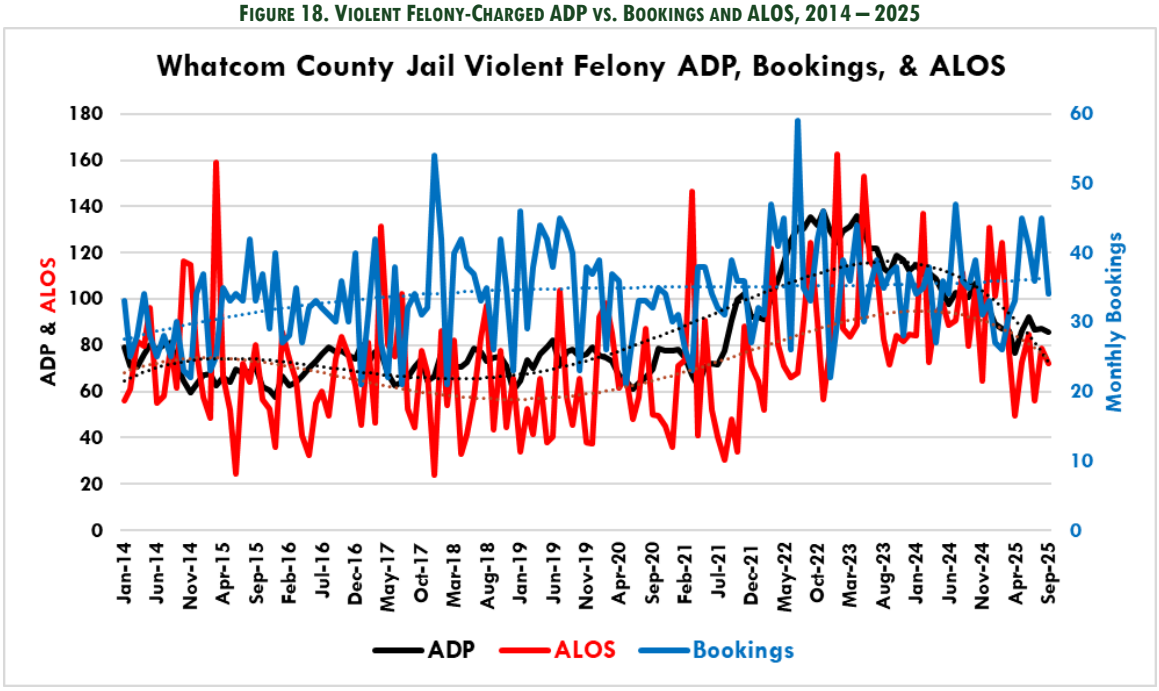


FIGURE 19. VIOLENT FELONY-CHARGED ADP VS. BOOKINGS AND ALOS, 2014 – 2025 (TRENDS)

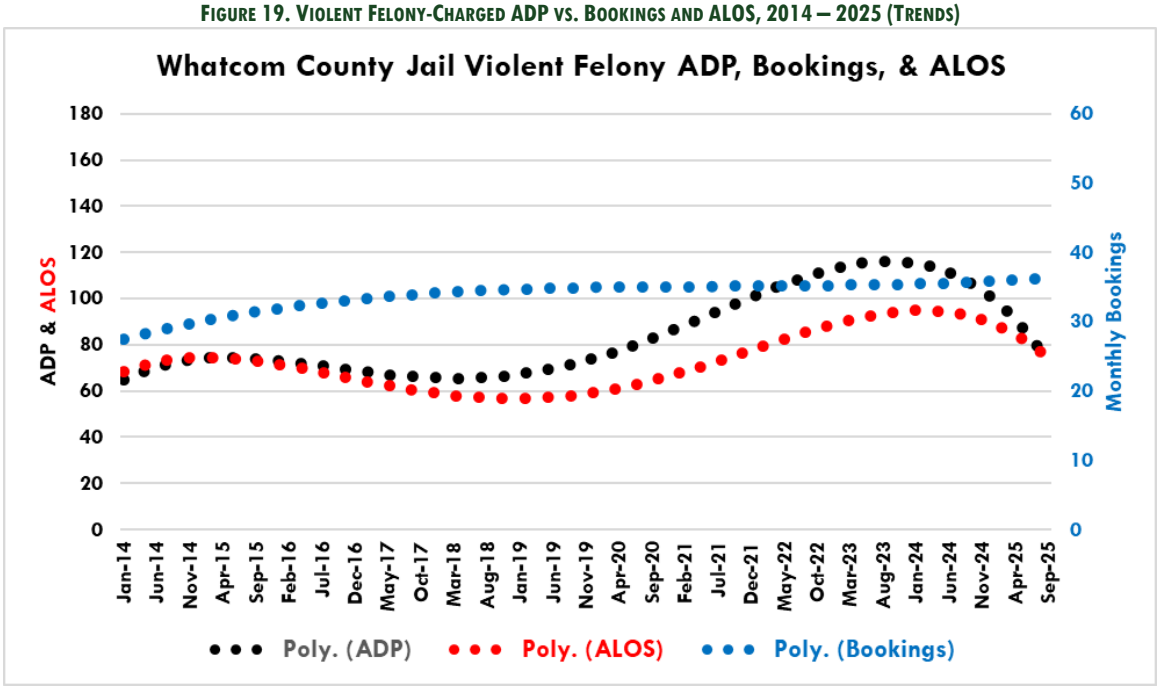


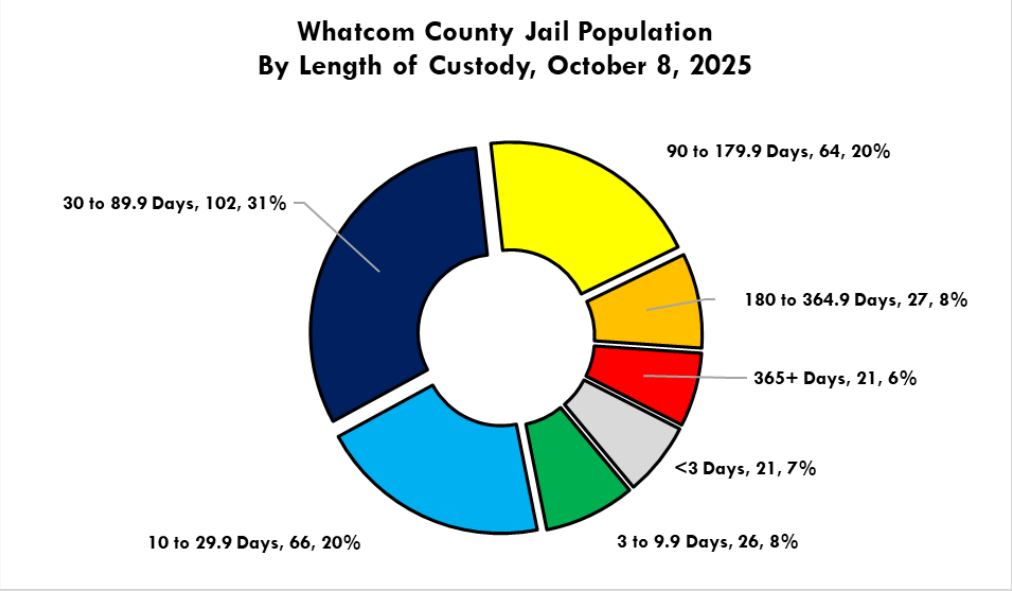
Table 8 depicts the actual annual numbers impacting the population of violent felony-charged people. The overall ADP has dropped in 2025 compared to 2024 due to a small decline in bookings and a large decrease in ALOS.

TABLE 8. VIOLENT FELONY-CHARGED ADP, ALOS, & BOOKINGS, 2014 – 2025

Year	ADP	Average Daily Bookings	Mean ALOS
2020	70.8	1.0	66.0
2021	80.0	1.1	69.3
2022	119.1	1.3	80.4
2023	122.3	1.2	103.0
2024	104.4	1.2	96.8
2025	85.7	1.1	77.0
Delta vs. 2021	7%	2%	11%
Delta vs. 2024	-18%	-6%	-20%

Figure 20 shows the currently held population by length of custody at the moment our data extract was pulled on October 8, 2025. The importance of this chart is to see what proportion of the population are long-stay people, which we classify as being held longer than 365 days. In jails similar to Whatcom County, the research team believes anything under 15% to be a proper proportion of long staying people. With Whatcom County's proportion at 6%, there is not really a critical case processing issue regarding long stay detainees in the facility.

FIGURE 20. WHATCOM COUNTY JAIL POPULATION ON OCTOBER 8, 2025

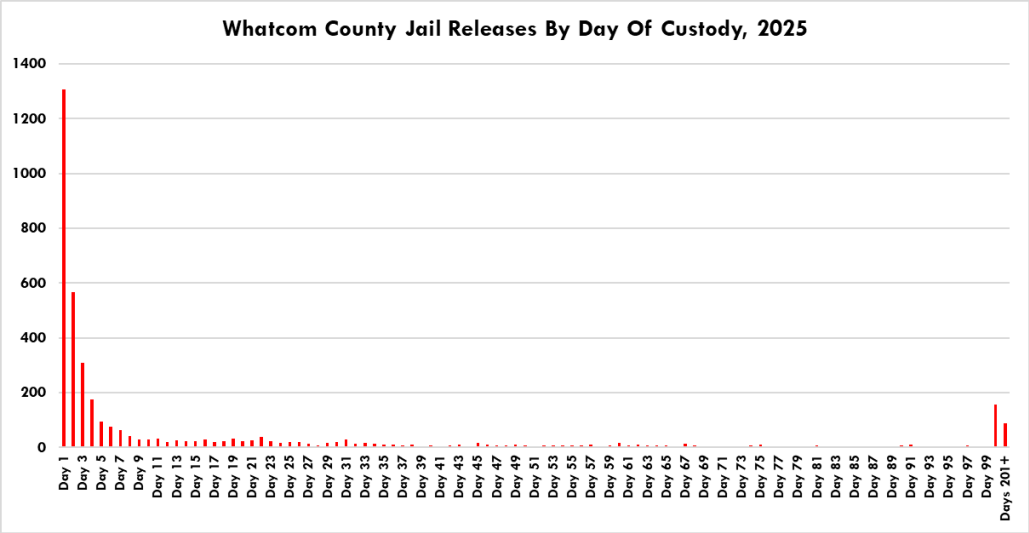


It is important to note that Figure 20 captures a moment in time that may potentially create some confusion regarding the reality of the jail's population dynamics. Note that the segment of people who stay under 3 days constitutes only 7% of the overall population. Keeping in mind that the jail's median length of stay (presented in Table 3) was 2 days in 2025, there is a significant amount of turnover for these 'short stay'

people on a constant basis. Put simply, there is a comparatively high number of people over the course of a typical day who are released before completing 2 full days in custody. Because of their short stays, their proportion of the overall ADP is relatively low. In an attempt to demonstrate this, Figure 21 was developed to depict the number of releases by day of custody during 2025. As Figure 21 demonstrates, the highest number of releases occurs on Day 1 (in other words, ranging from the first minute of custody to 23 hours and 59 minutes of custody). Day 2 begins at the 24-hour mark. There are 3,833 releases in the data. If the releases are sorted from shortest to longest stay, the middle case (the 1,917th record) is 2.0 (the median for 2025).

Overall, the short stay people churn in and out of the facility on a regular basis fairly regularly such that their numbers in the population don't appear all that impressive. However, in terms of actual counts, they are a significant number of the bookings/releases.

FIGURE 21. WHATCOM COUNTY JAIL RELEASES BY DAY OF CUSTODY, 2025



Population Analysis Summary

Table 9 provides an overall summary of the Whatcom County Jail ADP, bookings, and ALOS between 2020 and 2025. Mean jail ALOS is at its lowest point since the pandemic while bookings are at their highest point. If the jail's ALOS in 2025 was what it was in 2024, the ADP would be about 80 people higher. The reduction in ALOS has helped constrain ADP growth in 2025.

TABLE 9. ADP, ALOS, & BOOKINGS, 2020 – 2025

Year	ADP	Average Daily Bookings	Mean ALOS	Median LOS
2020	222.5	10.91	22.9	2.1
2021	230.2	9.00	28.2	2.1
2022	302.9	9.76	31.5	1.7
2023	314.2	11.73	31.1	1.6
2024	312.5	11.32	29.3	1.8
2025	333.2	14.00	23.9	2.0
Delta vs. 2021	45%	56%	-15%	-3%
Delta vs. 2024	7%	24%	-18%	11%

Finally, Figures 22 and 23 summarize the major jail population factors in single depictions. The Whatcom County Jail population story is that both admissions and ALOS are critical factors impacting the population

level. The increase in bookings in 2025 YTD has largely been offset by decreases in ALOS.

FIGURE 22. JAIL ADP, BOOKINGS, AND ALOS, 2014 - 2025

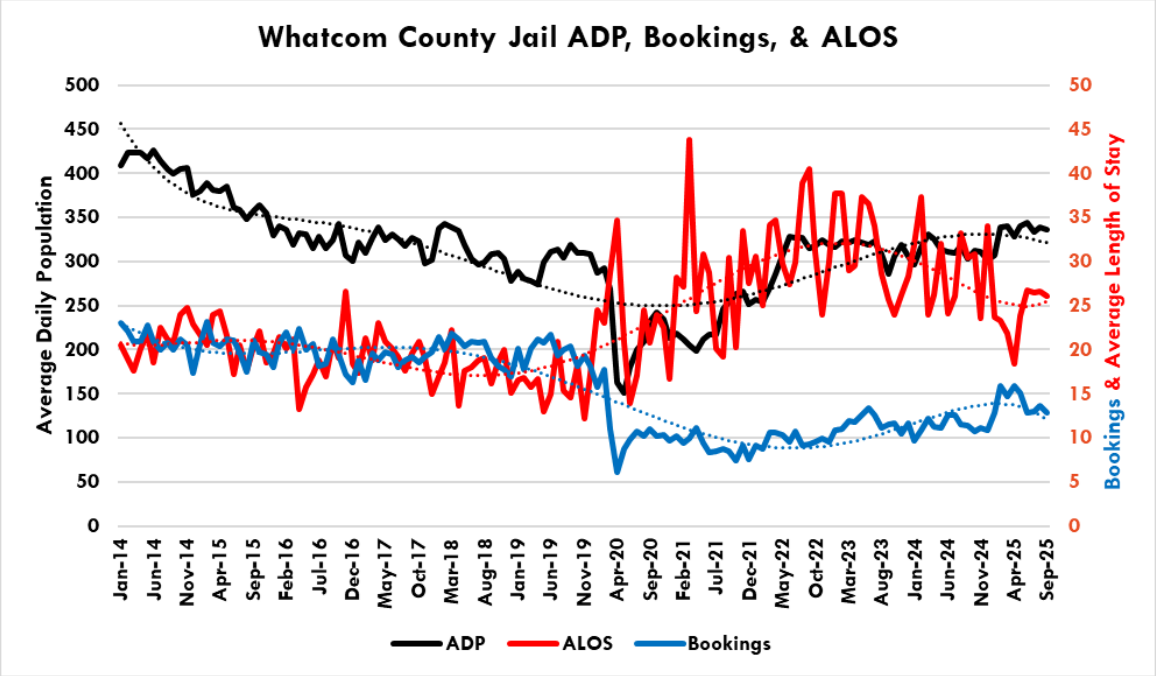
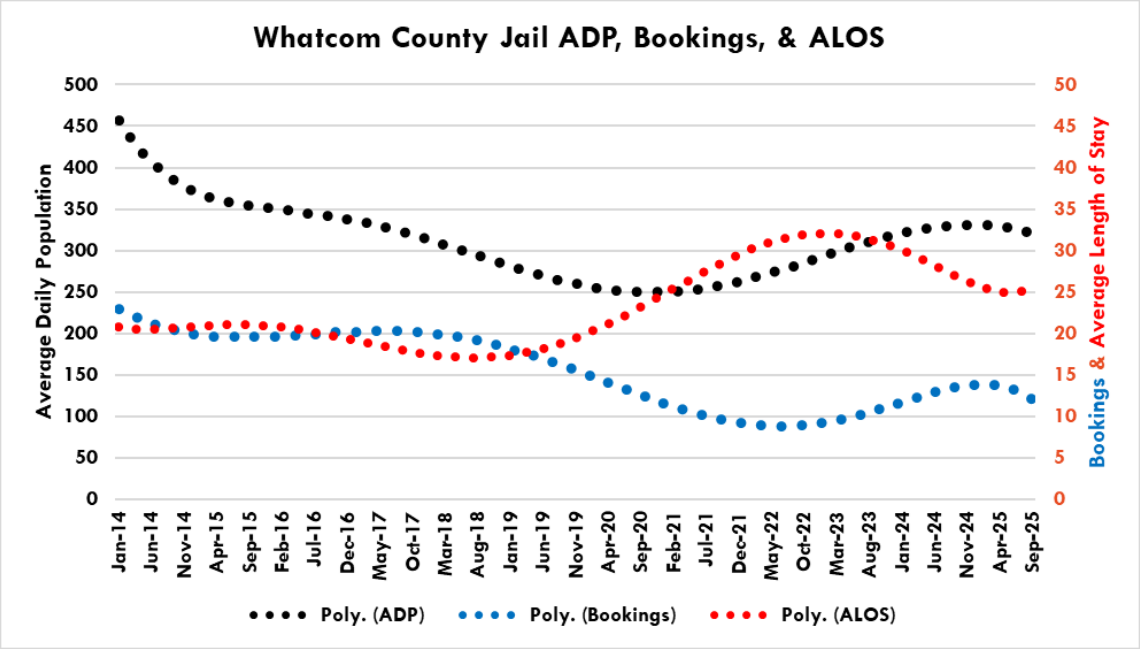


FIGURE 23. JAIL ADP, BOOKINGS, AND ALOS POLYNOMIAL TRENDS, 2014 - 2025



JAIL POPULATION FORECASTS

Strictly speaking, any jail population forecast is not a prediction of what will happen in the future. Our statisticians do not have a crystal ball that foretells the future. Rather, our primary jail forecast is a description of a possible future if nothing changes from how things are done in the present. As such, we will present the results of multiple jail population forecast models that were built to develop an array of Whatcom County Jail population outcomes through the year 2050.

Background and Methodology

The best predictor of any trend's future levels is the history of that trend. A jail's population time series trend is no different. However, because of the existence of unforeseen circumstances, it should be noted that the precision of forecasts of all kinds diminishes the further into the future one projects. All forecasts are only as good as what was known when the forecast was produced. The long-term accuracy of correctional population forecasting is heavily impacted by changes in public policy, law enforcement strategies, socioeconomic factors, and a host of other influences. Statistically speaking, correctional population forecasts by their very nature assume that the primary at the time the forecast is produced remains in place for the duration of the forecast. The margin of error for these forecasts is essentially plus or minus 10% by the year 2050.

In terms of actual forecast development methodologies, there are multiple methods for building statistical forecasts. The forecasting technique developed from Box and Jenkins' Autoregressive Integrated Moving Averages (ARIMA) approach is one of the best options. To that extent, a series of ARIMA forecasts of jail population variables were employed in this study. ARIMA is generally used in time series forecasting situations primarily because of its ability to avoid the built-in errors of other forecasting techniques. ARIMA approaches are designed to estimate, diagnose, and control autoregression problems. In addition, because ARIMA examines the past behaviors of a given trend, this approach can forecast multiple time points into the future. Moreover, ARIMA approaches allow the statistician to account for seasonal fluctuations in data as well as smooth out random fluctuations.

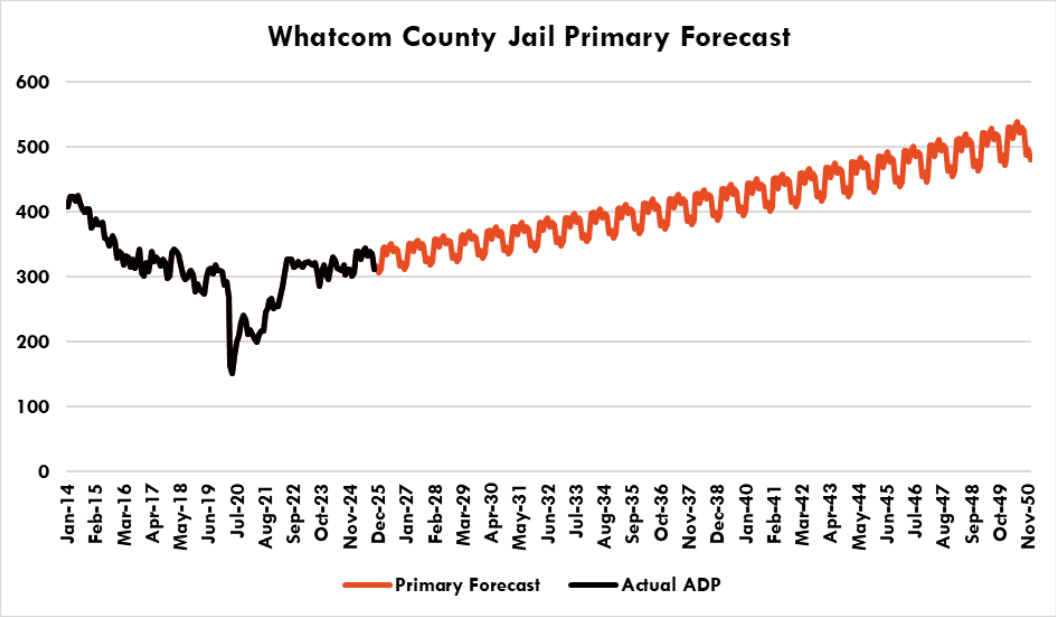
Primary Average Daily Population Forecast

Many ADP forecast models were built that utilized bookings, ALOS (itself forecasted using criminal court case processing trends), the Whatcom County free-world population, and the prior history of the ADP trend. The forecast model that performed the best on diagnostic measures of how well it fit the data called for an increasing seasonal trend going into the future at a level of about 514 detainees being held on average per day in 2050. Figure 24 represents the forecast. The black line depicts the actual ADP going back to 2014, while the orange line constitutes the projected population trend to 2050. The forecast trend is seasonal, with distinct peaks and valleys occurring each year. It must be stated very clearly that this forecast assumes that nothing changes in the criminal justice system or in the societal/public policy landscape for Whatcom County over time. In addition, a key assumption of this forecast is that there is a place for the population to be housed. As such, the forecast is not a prediction of the actual population a year or two from now. Instead, the forecast represents a continuation of the current trends and practices in place. Given some of the capacity realities that are present, the system will adapt decision-making in the short run to keep the population within acceptable capacity constraints. Essentially, the primary forecast requires suspension of reality in the short run.

That said, our primary forecast model calls for increases in bookings from the current level of 14 per day to around 20.5 per day in 2050. Also, ALOS is also projected to increase from 23.9 days to only 25 days.

The ALOS forecast model itself is relatively flat. In order to achieve that number, Whatcom County will need to add court divisions in the future as the population grows.

FIGURE 24. WHATCOM COUNTY JAIL PRIMARY POPULATION FORECAST



Conversion of Average Daily Population Forecast into the Needed Number of Beds

The forecast effort provides a starting point for the determination of the jail's future population. However, the forecast simply reflects only an average and as such it must be increased by two factors to arrive at the number of beds needed:

1. Peaking factor - to reflect the daily and seasonal variations in jail occupancy and to accommodate the temporary closure of beds due to the need for maintenance, and,

2. Classification factor - to adjust for the requirement to separate detainees as needed based on gender, security requirements, treatment needs, etc.

For the peaking factor calculation, we took the average of the top 5% highest reconstructed population days between January 2022 and October 2025 and compared those numbers to the ADP. The jail's daily population fluctuations were such that one could expect the highest population during any day to be 14.7% greater for females and 6.1% larger for males than the ADP.

In addition, not all detention beds are always available for use by every detainee. For instance, a vacant bed in a female unit cannot be filled with a male detainee, a maximum-security detainee cannot be placed in a vacant bed in a minimum-security setting, etc. A classification factor is, in effect, an acknowledgement of this reality. To include this factor, we used a commonly accepted standard of 10% for our estimations.

The peaking and classification factors are added to the ADP to complete the actual number of beds needed. Table 10 shows the bed need calculations for the population. Thus, the projected ADP for 2050 of 514 requires 604 beds to operate a safe and secure facility. It should be noted that the forecast holds the

female population proportion steady, which in reality may be difficult to achieve if capacity is made available.

TABLE 10. PRIMARY ADP FORECAST BED NEED CALCULATION

	Females				Males				Total ADP	Total Bed Need
	ADP	Peaking (14.7%)	Classification (10%)	Bed Need	ADP	Peaking (6.1%)	Classification (10%)	Bed Need		
2030	59	9	6	73	300	18	30	349	359	422
2035	64	9	6	80	329	20	33	381	393	462
2040	70	10	7	88	359	22	36	417	430	505
2045	77	11	8	96	393	24	39	456	470	552
2050	84	12	8	105	430	26	43	499	514	604

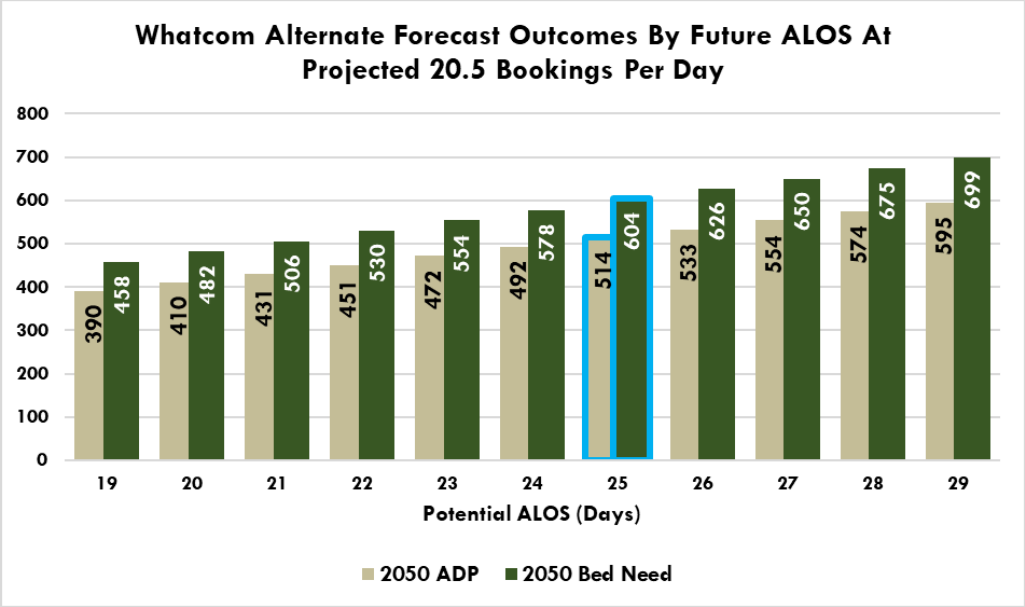
The trajectory of the primary forecast was applied to the special needs housing estimate that was provided earlier in Table 5. Table 11 depicts the projected bed need components by specific housing type in 5-year increments.

TABLE 11. PRIMARY ADP FORECAST BED NEED LOGIC APPLIED TO SPECIALIZED HOUSING ESTIMATE

		Current Pop		2030 Bed Need		2035 Bed Need		2040 Bed Need		2045 Bed Need		2050 Bed Need	
		Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
Special Housing	Acute MH	12	4	15	6	16	6	18	7	20	7	21	8
	Subacute MH	28	2.5	35	3	38	4	42	4	46	5	50	5
	Special Needs	5	2.5	6	3	7	4	7	4	8	5	9	5
	Suicidal	4	1.4	5	2	5	2	6	2	7	3	7	3
	Detoxification	5	2	6	3	7	3	7	3	8	4	9	4
	Medical	11	6	14	8	15	9	16	10	18	11	20	12
	Restrictive Housing	13	7	16	10	18	11	19	12	21	13	23	14
	Protective Custody	29	2	36	3	40	3	43	3	47	4	52	4
	Intake	36	7	45	10	49	11	54	12	59	13	64	14
General Population	Minimum	69	10	86	14	94	15	103	17	112	18	123	20
	Medium	26	3	32	4	35	5	39	5	42	5	46	6
	Maximum	7	2	9	3	10	3	10	3	11	4	12	4
	Workforce	35	4	44	6	48	6	52	7	57	7	62	8
Total		**280**	**53**	**349**	**73**	**381**	**80**	**417**	**88**	**456**	**96**	**499**	**105**

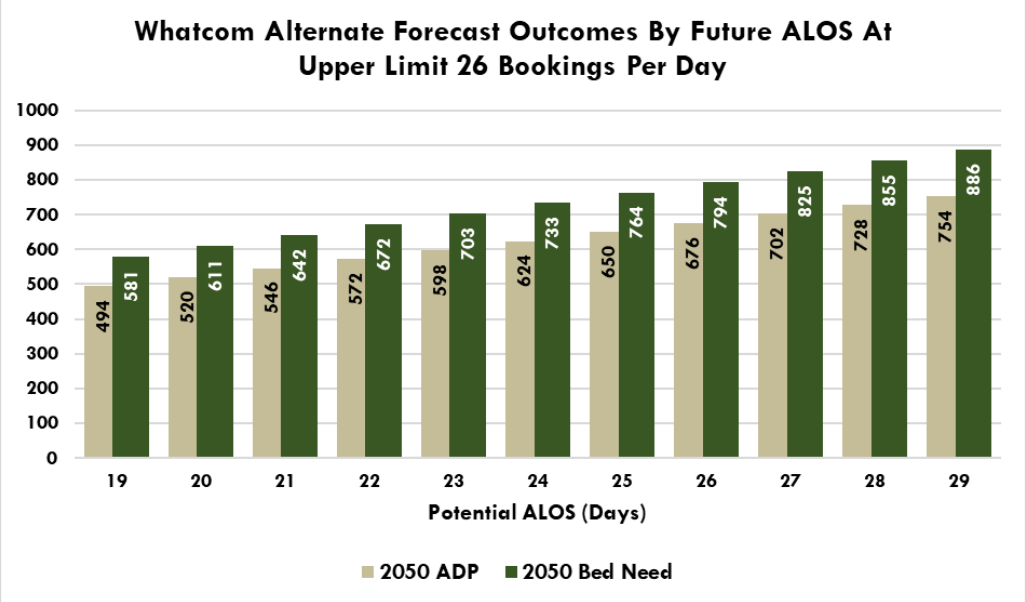
The primary forecast is only one potential outcome amid a myriad of possible outcomes for Whatcom County. In addition, and of much more importance is this one simple fact: the table above represents the bed need if *nothing changes in the system*. It is unrealistic to pretend that nothing will change in criminal justice policy in Whatcom County during the next quarter century. It is quite likely that system or public policy changes will affect ALOS. Thus, we present Figure 25, which examines potential variations in ALOS. A lower ALOS, such as 19 days (the left side of the chart) would dictate an ADP of 390 beds and a bed need of 458. Meanwhile, if ALOS grew to 29 days, the ADP could be as high as 595, with a bed need of 699. Managing ALOS into the future is critically important for Whatcom County.

FIGURE 25. WHATCOM COUNTY JAIL ADP & BED NEED AT VARIOUS ALOS LEVELS WITH 20.5 BOOKINGS PER DAY



Because a number of daily criminal justice decisions are made, consciously or not, within the context of limited jail bed capacity, the above forecast possibly underestimates the future booking trend if more capacity becomes available. For instance, if the County opened a new, expanded facility, it is logical to expect an increase in the number of bookings and detentions over and above currently-modeled growth rates. Using past experience with similarly situated jurisdictions, an additional set of forecast models was constructed that made the assumption that bookings would not be constrained by capacity. In other words, with extra capacity available, bookings will likely increase. Our analysis indicates that bookings may actually increase by 85% over current levels. Figure 26 examines the impact of this additional 5.5 bookings over and above the primary forecast model guidance. In this scenario, at the 25-day ALOS, the ADP and bed need goes from 514 and 604 respectively to 650 and 764 respectively.

FIGURE 26. WHATCOM COUNTY JAIL ADP & BED NEED AT VARIOUS ALOS LEVELS WITH 26 BOOKINGS PER DAY



CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There are several threats to the validity of our forecast assumptions, including increases in law enforcement staffing, unforeseen increases in arrests/detentions as a result of policy decisions, and any public policy efforts that restrict or enhance the availability of releases of pretrial individuals. Our study has attempted to minimize any surprising effects of such changes by providing likely outcomes with various booking and ALOS levels. The great unknown factor in this analysis is what the 'true' number of bookings/intakes will be for the jail if a new facility with added capacity comes online. It would be prudent to set in place a plan to manage jail utilization before such a facility opens.

One of the biggest recommendations that arose out of the production of this analysis has to do with the tracking of behavioral health levels in the population. It is critically important to have actionable mental health and substance use information in the jail's management system that can be tied to individual jail stays. This would allow for much more robust predictive analyses of this critical population. A best practice that we have encountered in other jurisdictions is the use of mental health ratings systems that would be placed and updated by providers (not line staff). For instance, Miami-Dade Corrections (at least as of 2021) uses a 10-point scale that is assigned to each person in custody. The rating changes as the person's acuity or diagnosis changes. This benefits staff by increasing awareness of who they are encountering. It benefits management and others by being able to depict, monitor, and manage this population. Orange County, Florida (at least as recently as 2015) used a 5-point scale that was maintained by staff psychiatrists. There are other solutions. It would be possible to require a healthcare provider to utilize the identification numbers within the jail's Spillman system in tracking reports. Franklin County, Ohio's health provider uses such a system, which enables the cross-matching of criminal justice information with diagnostic information. In instances where there is a valid HIPAA concern, the provider can utilize dummy identifications once the information linkages have been made, a solution that has been used in Cuyahoga County, Ohio, Macomb County, Michigan, and other large jail jurisdictions.

An additional recommendation is that it may be possible to reduce the jail's population by diverting more misdemeanants from custody. It is not at all uncommon for us to encounter jail populations that have felony population proportions of 90% or more. It is our understanding that the County is pursuing several diversion initiatives that are aimed at behavioral health in conjunction with non-violent offenses. While that is to be applauded, a larger diversion effort for all misdemeanants could be considered, especially in light of the jail's capacity struggles. A quick analysis based solely on charge levels with no knowledge of individual criminal histories estimates that if 50% of the non-violent, non-weapons, non-probation violation misdemeanants were able to be diverted, the ADP would be reduced by approximately 16. A 70% diversion rate could reduce the ADP by approximately 22. Using the 70% diversion rate on the mental health population (itself estimated due to data shortcomings) results in a potential ADP reduction of 16 (approximately a 5% impact).