



Hernando County Sheriff's Office

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Media Release

From: Jessica Burns
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Re: Hernando County Detention Center Moves Forward with Cost-Saving Improvements

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The operational needs at the Hernando County Detention Center have remained consistent since the Sheriff's Office assumed responsibility over 15 years ago. At that time, an independent consultant issued a scathing report on the facility's condition. While routine maintenance has helped, some issues require more than patchwork — they demand strategic investment.

Rather than waiting on long-term funding that may take years to materialize, Sheriff Al Nienhuis and the detention center team have implemented a practical, cost-conscious plan that improves daily operations, aligns with the long-term master plan, and reduces ongoing expenses. It's a smart step forward — not a final fix, but a meaningful move in the right direction.

The goals are straightforward:

Create an onsite warehouse and add freezer capacity

- Eliminate the offsite warehouse lease, which costs about \$50,000 per year.
- Improve deliveries by placing storage closer to the kitchen unloading area.
- Expand freezer space so the facility can take advantage of "power buys" and purchase food more efficiently.

Replace the failing visitation building

- The current visitation structure is extremely old and no longer serviceable.
- It requires a safer ramp, interior repairs, and major roof work projected to cost more than replacing the building.

- The new structure improves safety and provides a more suitable environment for visitation.

Replace and expand the maintenance building

- Maintenance needs and equipment have grown substantially since the Sheriff's Office took over operations in 2010.

- The new building includes an inmate work area where selected inmates assigned to maintenance can learn practical skills that can support employment after release.

The initial project estimate was created covering demolition, the building package, concrete, electrical, HVAC, plumbing, build-out supplies, cameras, and freezer capacity. Because of market variability in materials and pricing, the working budget was set at a "not to exceed" figure of \$350,000 to complete the full scope.

This plan was presented to Hernando County staff in March 2025, and final approval to proceed was granted in April 2025.

These structures are intentionally designed as non-permanent facilities that do not interfere with the long-term detention center master plan. They are a bridge solution that preserves future options and does not affect planned work on the east side of the detention center campus, where the first phase of the master plan was expected to begin.

As of December 15, 2025, progress has been strong:

- All three buildings have been assembled.
- Electricians are on site wiring the buildings.
- Internet, security cameras, plumbing, and HVAC are scheduled next.
- Sheriff's Office maintenance staff, with supervised inmate work crews, are framing out the interiors and building office spaces.

The team is optimistic the project will be completed in early 2026.

Just as important, this project reflects responsible stewardship of resources:

- Eliminating the offsite warehouse lease saves approximately \$50,000 per year, allowing the project to help pay for itself over time.
- No local tax dollars are being used. The buildings are funded through revenues generated by housing federal inmates and inmates from Pasco County.
- Those operational revenues are being reinvested directly into improvements that benefit conditions at the detention center, improve safety, and support more efficient operations and service delivery.

Bottom line: The operational needs at the detention center remain, and Sheriff Nienhuis and his team did not stand still. They took ownership, developed a practical plan, protected the long-term vision, and are delivering measurable progress with a clear operational payoff and no additional cost to Hernando County taxpayers.