

# Lonoke County Jail Sales Tax Referendum

Election Date: May 20, 2008

## **BALLOT TITLE: 1% Sales and Use Tax for Lonoke County Jail**

- **FOR** adoption of a 1% local sales and use tax within Lonoke County for a period of 12 months, the net collections of which remaining after deduction of the administrative charges of the State of Arkansas and required rebates, shall be distributed to and used by the County to acquire, construct and equip a new County Jail.
- **AGAINST** adoption of a 1% local sales and use tax within Lonoke County for a period of 12 months, the net collections of which remaining after deduction of the administrative charges of the State of Arkansas and required rebates, shall be distributed to and used by the County to acquire, construct and equip a new County Jail.

### **Why is the issue on the ballot?**

The Lonoke County Quorum Court has determined that the existing jail is inadequate to meet the current demands and needs of Lonoke County. The Quorum Court recommends that a new county jail is the best strategy to address this situation.

On March 17, 2008, the Lonoke County Quorum Court voted 10-0 (three quorum court members were absent) in favor of asking voters to approve a 1 percent county sales tax for duration of 12 months with funds generated from the tax to be used to acquire, construct and equip a new county jail.

### **Why is the existing jail inadequate?**

The Lonoke County jail was built in 1972 and remodeled in 1992.<sup>1</sup> The jail was initially designed for 40 beds. Cell additions have increased jail capacity to 72<sup>1</sup> beds. Currently, there is no central control format and cell doors face every direction, making safe control of prisoners more difficult. In addition, the current jail does not have a "sally port" (safety area for loading and

unloading prisoners). This is a potential public safety hazard since prisoners are currently loaded and unloaded in a public area.

According to the County Sheriff, there are also problems with the jail's infrastructure and equipment. Electrical and plumbing systems are in poor operating condition and the lock system is outdated, sometimes rendering an environment that is unsanitary and unsafe for both prisoners and employees. The camera monitoring system is considered poor.

There are problems with overcrowding. Despite a capacity for 72 inmates, the daily inmate census at the Lonoke County jail has been as high as 98, according to county records. Although the inmate census fluctuates from day to day, the average daily inmate census in 2007 was 80. Female jail cells are designed to accommodate 7 prisoners. On some occasions, the female prisoner census has reached 15. In 2002, a 3.5 million dollar lawsuit was filed against the county by an inmate concerning overcrowding in the jail. The overcrowding issue is of particular concern because the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) is actively pursuing cases of overcrowding in jails in Arkansas.

### **Is a new jail the best option?**

County officials and quorum court members state that they have considered other ways of solving the prisoner housing problem, including housing prisoners in other counties and renovating the current jail. They believe that with an estimated cost of \$30 per prisoner per day in addition to transportation costs, vehicle wear and tear, and time spent transporting prisoners to and from court hearings, housing prisoners elsewhere is not a viable option. They are also concerned that space in other jails may not be available when needed. Officials also contend the current jail is in such bad repair that remodeling would be more expensive than constructing a new jail. The county is currently spending over \$2,000 each month in repairs to the county jail.

<sup>1</sup>From State of Arkansas Detention Facility Compliance Report



## What are the plans for a new jail?

A new jail with an inmate capacity of 140 is estimated by county officials and quorum court members to cost from 5 to 5.5 million dollars. At current incarceration rates, a 140-bed jail would meet Lonoke County needs well past 2030 based on population projections from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock's Census Data Center. The new jail will be designed and built to meet state standards.

Revenue from the proposed sales and use tax may only be used for acquiring, constructing and equipping the new jail. The county will use funds in its operating budget to cover the operation and maintenance costs of the new jail.

## How much revenue will the 1% sales tax generate?

Based on current sales tax collections, it is estimated the sales tax will generate approximately 5.5 million dollars.

## When will the sales tax begin and end?

If passed, the tax will begin October 1, 2008, and end September 30, 2009.

## Who will pay the additional tax?

The tax will be paid by everyone purchasing goods or services subject to a sales and use tax anywhere in the county, including its cities. It is estimated that 5 percent of the sales tax revenue generated (or approximately \$275,000) will be paid by tourists and visitors who purchase goods and services in the county but live elsewhere.

The following table shows the estimated cost of a 1 percent sales tax on households.<sup>2</sup> It assumes that the average household in Lonoke County makes 65 percent of its purchases in the county. Note that these are rough estimates and may not reflect actual costs to individual households.

<sup>2</sup> Computed using household expenditure patterns from the Consumer Expenditure Survey (U.S. Bureau of Census) and Lonoke County purchase coefficients from IMPLAN (Minnesota IMPLAN Group, Inc.)

Household Income	Estimated Sales Tax Paid for Jail
\$ 5,000-12,499	\$ 65
\$12,500-18,749	\$ 96
\$18,750-24,999	\$114
\$25,000-37,499	\$134
\$37,500-49,999	\$173
\$50,000-62,499	\$208
\$62,500-93,749	\$249
>\$93,750	\$286

## What will happen if the tax does not pass?

If the proposed tax does not pass, Lonoke County's responsibility for housing and protecting inmates still remains. The county's elected officials will have to explore other methods of funding this responsibility. In 2007, the Lonoke County jail budget (including maintenance) was \$680,723. Using the current jail capacity of 72, the annual cost of housing inmates in other counties could exceed \$788,000 per year. This could cost the county \$107,277 more than the current jail budget.

## What do supporters say?

Supporters say building a new county jail is the best alternative for housing inmates in Lonoke County. Supporters say a new jail will provide extra capacity that will be needed as the county's population continues to grow. Supporters say a new jail will provide a safer environment for employees and inmates. Supporters say a sales tax is the best method to fund a new jail for Lonoke County.

## What do opponents say?

Opponents say a sales tax may not be the best funding option for a new jail because it places a heavier burden on low-income families. Opponents say increasing the sales tax rate in Lonoke County may result in both economic and revenue loss to the county. Opponents say the increased sales tax rate may cause Lonoke County residents to shop more in surrounding counties.

**Please Vote on May 20, 2008**

**Conflict of Interest:** This fact sheet was prepared to provide the citizens of Lonoke County with information to help them in making an informed decision on Election Day. An effort has been made to ensure that information is presented in a fair and balanced way that best represents the facts associated with this ballot issue. As part of this effort, the University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service is obligated to divulge potential conflicts of interest and to recognize their influence on the educational programs and material we produce. The Lonoke County Cooperative Extension Service office is partially funded by Lonoke County general funds. As such, any ordinance affecting revenues of the county has the potential to affect the Lonoke County Extension office.

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