August 8, 2025
Update on Detention Center Escape

On July 29, 2025 at approximately 11:20am, the Union County Detention Center received an inquiry from the Union County Sheriff's Office about the possibility of an escape. After performing a security check, detention center staffed confirmed that two pre-sentenced detainees had escaped the facility. At 11:32 am, Supervisor Phillip Russell was notified of the escape and that both individuals were in custody at Hart County Detention Center in Georgia.

After being made aware of the escape and subsequent capture of the detainees, Supervisor Russell immediately contacted the Detention Center Director, to confirm the detention facility was on lock down, and requested that the facility remain in lock down until further notice. He directed him to secure all pertinent records in preparation for a thorough investigation. After seeing to immediate security needs with the Director, Supervisor Russell contacted appropriate staff to meet with the Detention Center Director to make emergency repairs necessary to correct any deficiencies discovered that allowed for the breach in security to occur.

Supervisor Russell then contacted the Sheriff and requested that his office conduct an investigation of all circumstances surrounding the escape.

Supervisor Russell was notified of the escape and capture of the detainees simultaneously. At the time of notification there was no danger to the public. As the detainees were in custody, the first priority of Supervisor Russell and staff was to make the detention facility safe, and prevent any other escape possibilities. Second was to ensure that the investigative process into the event be conducted in a timely manner. Supervisor Russell posted a press release as soon as practical after the event occurred.

The escapees were pre-sentenced detainees who, due to overcrowding of the jail, were being housed in a dorm facility located at the work camp area of the Detention Center. Prior to their escape the detainees determined that due to breakdown of cement, they could manipulate two of the bars covering a plexiglass window in one of the cells in the dorm. After making the discovery, these individuals allegedly conspired with other detainees as well as civilian accomplices to facilitate the escape.

On the night of July 28, 2025, Union County Detention Center was operating with a full 6 person staff. There is body worn camera footage to document that the detainees were present in the facility during a security check of the dorm at 10:05 pm. At some point after the 10:05 security check the detainees manipulated the bars from the aging mortar, exited the dorm facility, and fled the grounds of the Union County Detention Center. The condition of the aging facility directly contributed to the ability of the detainees to escape. Union County has addressed the aged condition of the facility by constructing a new jail addition. This new addition is currently pending SC Department of Corrections and State Fire Marshal approval before detainees can begin occupying the new 62 bed jail facility. Had these detainees been housed in the new facility the likelihood of this escape would have been greatly reduced.

As review of this event has progressed, we have discovered that the Detention Center has documented proper SC Department of Corrections approved policies, procedures and protocols in place and that all staff have been trained on them; however, the failure of some employees on shift the night of July 28 and morning of July 29, 2025 resulted in the escape going undiscovered until after the staff were alerted that the detainees were in the custody of another law enforcement agency in a neighboring state.

In summary, Union County Detention Center has current proper policies, procedures and protocols in place. Employees have been trained on them and have electronic access to them, for reference, at any time through the software portal that each officer uses for shift reporting and other communications. The Detention Center budget provides for current adequate staffing per the approved staffing plan that is in place for the current facility. The escape was a result of deterioration of an aged facility and the lack of discovery was due to failure to adhere to proper policies, procedures and protocols by personnel. Emergency repairs to the currently facility have taken place while we await final approval to occupy the new facility. After the population has been moved to the new facility there will be an opportunity for additional inspection, upfits, and repairs to the facility that is currently in use while it is vacant.
All personnel matters have been addressed.

“This escape is embarrassing to me, as your supervisor, and to our Detention staff. While we cannot change what happened, we can learn from it. We can use what we have learned to improve on our policies, processes and procedures; and we can hold employees accountable for following the standards that are put in place for the safety and security of the personnel, detainees, and the public. My office will comply with confidentially laws surrounding any personnel actions that were taken as a result of this event. Corrections employees have tremendously difficult jobs, and we are thankful for the many experienced officers that we are

fortunate to have on staff; but it is increasing difficult to hire and train new personnel to take on the complex duties required of corrections staff."-Phillip G. Russell, II, Union County Supervisor

A separate press release will be provided today by Sheriff Jeff Bailey, in relation to arrests made for individuals who have been charged for allegedly assisting the detainees before and after this escape.

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