

Local Bill

Compensation for Health Care Services for Inmates in Indian River County

Background

Inmate healthcare spending has increased exponentially statewide and nationwide. Last year the Indian River County Sheriff budgeted \$600,000 for off-site (outside-the-jail) medical care such as hospitals, physicians, and ambulances to provide care for inmates that exceed the ability for in-house medical staff to provide. The County approached the Sheriff this past year concerning these rising costs. The Sheriff's original proposed budget submitted to the Indian River County Board of County Commissioners in May 2025, included \$650,000 for off-site costs, which represents an 8.3% increase.

The Sheriff has informed the County pursuant to §901.35(2)(a), Florida Statutes, the County is responsible for the payment of inmate medical costs, and as of October 1, 2025, the Sheriff will no longer accept responsibility for inmate hospitalizations or medical costs out of the jail. Providers will now be directed to the County for payment.

The costs for off-site inmate health care have continued to rise, and the County has witnessed the impact this issue has had on surrounding counties' budgets, specifically St. Lucie and Martin County, both of whom had local bills passed (2024 and 2025 respectively). The County desires to get ahead of this to prevent Indian River County taxpayers from paying unnecessarily exorbitant costs for off-site inmate medical costs.

Status

In Florida, §945.6041, Florida Statutes provides the Florida Department of Corrections to limit payment to outside medical providers to 110% of the established Medicare rate. Staff is proposing a local bill that will reduce off-site inmate medical expenses by extending the state caps to Indian River County and setting a standardized reimbursement rate for health care providers that mimics the language already in the Florida Statutes. Compensation would be limited to 110% of the Medicare allowable rate, or 125% of the Medicare allowable rate if the health care provider reported a negative operating margin for the previous year. In 2024, the Florida Legislature passed a local bill HB1023 to provide relief and the ability for St. Lucie County to manage costs.

In 2025, the Florida Legislature passed HB 4007 for Martin County which provides similar relief and includes definitions of key terms such as air ambulance, ambulance, emergency medical transportation services, and health care provider among other refinements. A final bill analysis is attached.

Both bills provide the same protection that is currently in place for the Florida Department of Corrections (section 945.6041, Florida Statutes) and prevent medical providers, who

must be used due to proximity to a county correction facility, from taking advantage because of a monopoly on services.

Staff anticipates that a local bill becoming law in Indian River County has the potential to realize a significant cost savings in offsite medial costs and not experience the deleterious effects on its budget other Counties have experienced.

Issues

The bill with similar language to Martin County's bill from 2025 is currently being drafted.

Legal Sufficiency Review

To the extent this item contains legal issues it has been reviewed for legal sufficiency, though it is primarily a matter of Board policy.

Recommended Action

Request the Board authorize staff to take necessary steps to present a Local Bill at the Indian River County 2026 Legislative Delegation Meeting, re: Compensation for Health Care Services for Inmates in Indian River County, as part of Indian River County's 2026 State Legislative Priorities.