



COLORADO JAIL STANDARDS

IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT OPERATIONS

WOLD ARCHITECTS & ENGINEERS

Recently adopted jail standards in Colorado have direct impacts on operations, as they pertain to detainee services and how staff operate within the physical facilities. County Sheriffs across Colorado are finding that these requirements also have implications for planning, design, renovation, and expansion of detention facilities.

In 2022, the Colorado Jail Standards Commission was created with the goal of setting baselines for jail conditions, out of a need to balance the rights, humanity, and dignity of persons experiencing incarceration with safety and security, create consistency across counties while still allowing for individuation, and create a framework for implementation and enforcement.

In 2024, the jail standards were adopted, and they will go into effect on July 1, 2026. The commission anticipates a staged or tiered implementation of the standards, and the creation of a variance procedure that allows jails to request specific and reasonable variances to specific standards.

THE BOTTOM LINE

The recently adopted jail standards in Colorado may encourage upgrades or retrofits in order to address requirements. Facilities in the future may trend to be:

- Larger and more modular
- Visually transparent but secure
- Health and mental-health-oriented
- Life-safety driven
- Operationally efficient and staff-centered



WHAT COULD THIS MEAN FOR JAIL FACILITIES?

The standards could have important considerations in these five key areas:

1. Housing Unit Space Planning & Design

The standards prescribe minimum spatial allowances that strongly influence building size and layout, emphasizing direct supervision and humane conditions.

- Cells and dormitories have minimum square footage per inmate that affects overall footprint and floor-to-floor efficiency.
- Dayrooms must have adequate space for varied activities and transparent glazing for views.
- Clear sight lines are important to building layout, for jail staff to perform observation and visual inspection of cells, showers and common areas.
- Gender and classification separation must be considered, driving duplication of spaces or modular housing pods.

What could this mean?

A larger building, a more compartmentalized layout, increased secure glazing and careful adjacency planning to reduce staff movement and inmate transport.

Jail Standards Requirements for Space Programming



Minimum square footage per inmate affects overall footprint and floor-to-floor efficiency

2. Security, Life Safety, & Code Compliance

The standards promote levels of security appropriate to inmate classification, as well as fundamental code compliance for life safety, fire protection and emergency response features.

- Tamper-resistant, security-grade materials and fixtures
- Two means of egress from housing areas
- Smoke compartments and fire-rated separations
- Emergency power and lighting
- ADA-accessible cells, showers, toilets, visitation and program spaces

What could this mean?

Complex coordination between security and life-safety systems, often increasing wall and door fireratings as well as increasing mechanical and electrical spaces. Careful architectural and engineering details to balance durability and dignity. Older facilities may need substantial updates to meet the requirements.

3. Health & Welfare of All Detainees

The standards reflect modern correctional best practices to support the health and wellness of individuals who are incarcerated.

- Dedicated medical clinics and mental health interview rooms
- Ligature and suicide-resistant fixtures in all spaces occupied by a detained person
- Observation rooms with controlled visibility
- Acoustic privacy for evaluations and noise reduction
- Natural and artificial lighting requirements
- Ventilation and temperature control
- Access to outdoor recreation

What could this mean?

Specialized unit design, non-institutional finishes where possible, ligature-resistant detailing, and increased demand for behavioral-health-focused spaces. Larger window openings with secure glazing, mechanical system zoning, acoustical treatments, and exterior secure recreation yards may need to be integrated into site planning.

4. Operational Efficiency & Staffing

Standards indirectly influence architecture through staffing and supervision expectations.

- Reduced inmate movement throughout the facility
- Centralized control points
- Efficient staff circulation

What could this mean?

Compact housing pods, centralized control rooms, stacked functional zones, and clear separation of public, secure, and staff-only circulation.

5. Renovation & Expansion Constraints

For existing jails, compliance to the standards will drive major architectural decisions.

- Older facilities may require structural modifications to meet space standards and provide sight-lines for observation and control.
- Incremental expansion must also comply fully with standards.

What could this mean?

Additions rather than interior retrofits, phased construction strategies, and sometimes full replacement as more cost-effective than renovation.

About Wold Architects and Engineers

Wold Architects and Engineers is a full-service planning, architecture and engineering firm with offices in Colorado, Minnesota, Illinois, and Tennessee. Wold is committed to delivering exceptional results for the communities it serves. To learn more, please visit www.woldae.com.



Ligature-Resistance



Prevent Self-Harm & Suicide

Acoustics



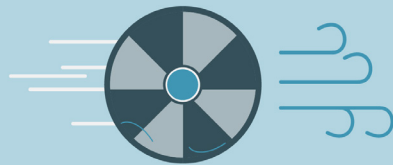
Noise Reduction & Sound Control

Lighting & Views



Natural & Artificial Lighting

Air & Comfort



Ventilation & Temperature Control

Outdoor Access



Safe Recreation Yards