

May 15, 2024

Dear Sheriff Hernandez,

Thank you to you and your staff for meeting with us this past Friday, May 10th. We appreciated the opportunity to ask clarifying questions about the Sheriff's Office's existing practices for accommodations of religious practices and expression within its facilities.

During our discussion, we offered four proposals to protect individuals' religious rights while detained. We write to document those requests, adapted to reflect information learned in our conversation on Friday. These requests stem from individuals' direct recent experience with incarceration in the Travis County Jail:

1. We ask that you allow individuals to wear religious head coverings for photographs taken during the book in process. We ask that your office put into place an official policy making clear that no separate photograph is taken without head coverings and that any photographs that currently exist in this "separate" file of photos are not to be retained or distributed beyond any requirements of Texas Law.
2. We ask that you ensure there is an official policy making clear that security inspections, such as those upon entry to the facility, are completed in private with only an officer of the same gender identity as the arrested person within view. Please ensure, for example, that no male personnel are present when women have skin exposed during pat-downs or searches.
3. We ask that you ensure there is an official policy allowing individuals to continuously wear their own religious head coverings while they are in jail unless they request the Jail provide them with head coverings. Any jail-provided head coverings should be cloth rather than paper.
4. We ask that you maintain sufficient temperature-appropriate long-sleeve shirts at all jail facilities to ensure anyone that requests one receives one, and there is an official policy that those articles of clothing are provided without additional questioning.

We believe these accommodations will help safeguard the rights of individuals to practice their faith.

Furthermore, we request the following documents:

1. Any policies governing religious practices, including the plan submitted to the Texas Commission on Jail Standards pursuant to Rule §291.5.
2. Any security plans that implicate religious head coverings.

3. Any policies regarding the separate photo of detained people without religious head coverings. In particular, we'd like any materials documenting why this separate photo is taken, who has access or can request access to these photos, and how long these photos are stored in the system.
4. Any information about Chaplain Services' offerings to people before and after they are magistrates.
5. Any information about religious and health accommodations for meal offerings pre-magistration.

We further request a meeting in approximately two weeks to discuss your response to these requests and any timeline for implementation.

Thank you again for your time and consideration. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

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