Trouble in the Heartland: Challenges Confronting Rural Jails

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Abstract:
There has been very little scholarship on the roles and functions of rural jails in the United States. This study examines some of the key challenges facing these small correctional institutions, using data from two national surveys, focus groups of jail administrators, and the results from a survey of Texas jail administrators. These studies solicited information about the operational challenges and changing offender populations in small and rural jails. In order to better respond to these changing characteristics, a number of policy options for rural jails are considered, including: regionalization, transferring the operations of local jails to state departments of corrections, increasing alternatives to incarceration, expanding local capacity, abiding by standards or becoming accredited, and privatizing local corrections. The merits of these different solutions are examined.

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