

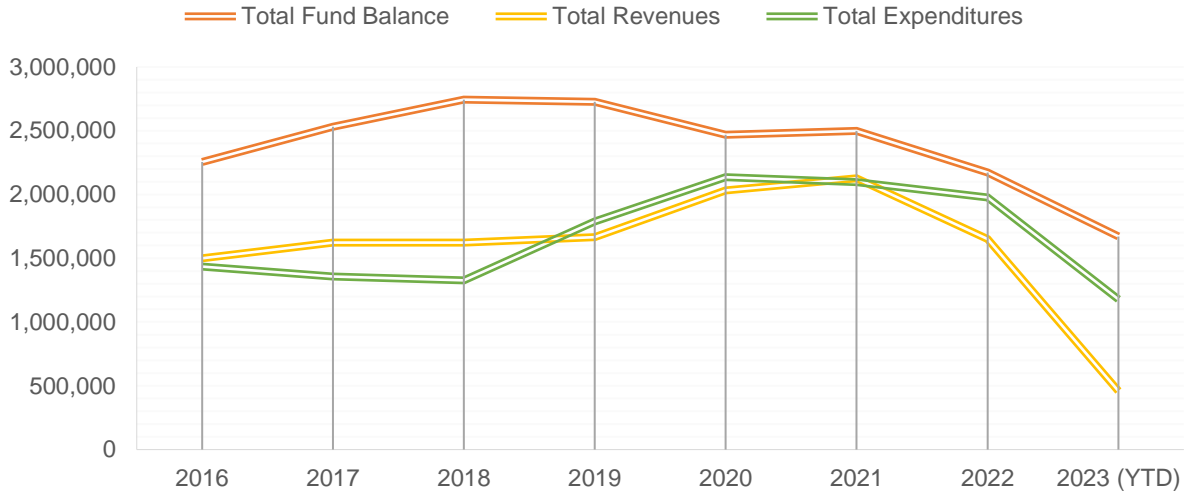


The Incarcerated Individuals Welfare Fund (IIWF) is a County Board-managed fund used to support the welfare of incarcerated people housed in the Allegheny County Jail (ACJ). The IIWF's source of funds derives from the commission the County receives as part of commissary purchases. The Jail Oversight Board (JOB) manages the IIWF and approves disbursements but given a lack of written spending directives or criteria for expenses, the JOB has historically used these funds for a variety of purposes. This raises concerns because disbursements have funded programs and services that should be covered operationally by other agencies, and funds are not being approved with the input from incarcerated people or their financial support networks. This report provides an overview and recommendations to prioritize so the IIWF can be better administered and disbursed.

In February 2020, and amid concerns the County established an incentive to incarcerate more people while underproviding jail-related services, the JOB created a subcommittee to examine how the commission the County received from commissary sales should be spent. This was an important first step for a fund generating revenues exceeding \$2.1 million annually since 2016 from contracted commission rates of 55.1% (under the Jail's previous vendor, Elior d/b/a Summit Food Service) and 35% (under the new commissary vendor, Oasis Management Systems). The subcommittee, however, did not establish guidelines, solicit input from incarcerated people and their loved ones, nor release procedure changes.

Funds in turn have been used without clear criteria. During 2019-2020, the JOB approved IIWF disbursements of \$272,851.50 for nearly 5,000 suicide prevention blankets, \$75,000 for 1,000 Narcan nasal spray kits, \$23,768 for the Jail's family visitor center, and \$53,828 for a court-ordered domestic violence prevention program. More than \$200,000 was also disbursed to fund the HOPE Pre-Release Program (life skills programming on anger management, drug and alcohol use, and parenting). On the other hand, the Board denied a Jail request for \$120,096 to fund a two-year contract with LexisNexis to provide a digital law library for residents, citing state law requirements. In the last two years, the JOB has primarily dispersed the funds to provide: (1) incentive payments for residents who receive COVID-19 vaccinations and (2) monthly stipends for each resident to purchase commissary items and tablet-related amenities (initially approved as a stopgap given concerns with Summit's food service).

Looking forward, the Board must better examine this fund's usage, evaluate the recommendations in this report, and involve community members, incarcerated or otherwise, to develop more appropriate standards. An overview is below:



	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023 (YTD)
<b>Total Revenue</b>	1,501,275	1,624,113	1,622,814	1,665,513	2,031,456	2,126,953	1,650,498	459,390
<b>Total Expenditures</b>	1,435,026	1,357,907	1,325,843	1,787,548	2,135,936	2,096,900	1,976,272	1,178,255
<b>Total Fund Balance</b>	2,255,606	2,531,427	2,744,055	2,728,209	2,467,907	2,497,660	2,171,886	1,671,659
<b>Revenue Rate</b>	--	8.18%	-0.08%	2.63%	21.97%	4.70%	-23.03%	--

Notably, review of the IIFW highlights the total fund balance dropped 23.03% since 2022. It is likely the Fund will continue to diminish given current expenditures, different commissary prices, a new commission rate, frequency of sales, changes to the monthly incarcerated population, and efficacy of food service. The JOB has an opportunity to address these concerns now and should evaluate the following considerations to ensure the IIFW is better governed and administered:

1. The Board should end use of IIFW funds for programs and services that would fall under an operational expense or responsibility of the County, Jail, or other agency. For instance, using IIFW funds to offset concerns with ACJ's food service is a short-term benefit for residents but inefficient use of IIFW and County funds, especially to the extent that available County resources can and should address vendor performance issues.
2. The IIFW subcommittee and JOB must establish policies and procedures regarding the IIFW's intended use, its directives, and criteria for processing expenditure requests. This must include input from incarcerated people and the larger public and codified in JOB bylaws and rules of governance.



3. Since 2018, the County has received grant money as part of the MacArthur Foundation's Safety and Justice Challenge to reduce County incarcerated populations by 20% and eliminate racial and ethnic disparities in its criminal justice system. The County has reduced its incarcerated population since then, and along with the new commission rates, commissary prices, and vendor, Oasis, the IIWF's revenue rate has been impacted. Given quarterly stipend allotments and plans to fund projects such as an oversight liaison, the IIWF subcommittee must meet to evaluate all current expenditures, establish a set of funding directives and guidelines, and begin identifying potential sources for future funding requests, programs, and services.
4. If the County chooses to continue receiving commission from commissary sales, and spending it without incarcerated input, the Board should identify clear programs and services to fund, including those presently in the community, that verifiably benefits incarcerated people at ACJ and/or those returning to society.