

Issue Paper: Courthouse Security (23 Oct 2025)



Executive Summary

The Giles County Courthouse currently has multiple security and safety vulnerabilities, including uncontrolled public entrances, inoperable screening equipment, outward-swinging doors without safe landings, and court offices lacking remote lockdown capability. This paper recommends an iterative approach that will allow consolidating to a single public entrance with updated screening equipment, constructing exterior porches for safe emergency egress, and installing electronic access controls for court offices, coordinated with the pending renovation project, to ensure code compliance and protect staff and the public.

Background

The Giles County Courthouse remains an active judicial and administrative facility serving multiple offices, including Circuit Court, Chancery Court, and the Clerk and Master. Security responsibilities are shared between the Sheriff's Office and County Executive, with guidance from Tennessee's Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) and applicable building codes.

At present, the building has multiple entrances used by employees and the public, with limited ability to control access or provide consistent screening. Existing magnetometer and screening equipment require replacement.

As part of the courthouse renovation planning, several related safety issues have been identified:

- The east and west exterior doors have been reconfigured to swing outward for code compliance, but there are no exterior landings or porches, which is unsafe for emergency egress.
 - The Circuit and Chancery Court offices and judicial chambers have panic buttons connected to the Sheriff's security officers and E911, but there are no electronic locks or controls that would allow those offices to lock-down in a threat situation.
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Discussion

A. Public Entrance and Screening

Consolidating public access to a single controlled entrance will significantly improve security management. A single point of entry allows for consistent screening, reduces Sheriff staffing requirements, and aligns with best practices for courthouse security.

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To support this change, the county will need to purchase a new magnetometer and screening station, to be funded from county capital funds. Other building access points would remain available for staff or emergency egress only, with appropriate signage and access controls.

B. Exterior Door Egress and Code Compliance

During design review, the architect identified that the east and west doors must swing outward to comply with modern fire and life-safety codes. An AOC grant covered the cost of renovating the original doors and reconfiguring their swing. However, since there are no exterior landings, these doors now open directly to a drop-off.

To meet code and ensure safe use in an emergency, the courthouse renovation must include an extended porch that provide a safe landing, and integrate appropriately with the building's historic façade. This modification is a code requirement as well as a public safety measure, and should be included within the renovation project scope and budget. The County Executive is currently pursuing a state grant to address this issue, separate from other renovations.

C. Office Security and Access Control

The Chancery and Circuit Court offices, along with the judges' chambers, lack the ability to secure their doors electronically. Although panic buttons are installed, they do not restrict access or allow remote lockdown in the event of a disturbance.

The County should evaluate installation of electronic access controls such as keycard or fob systems, with capability for remote door locking and coordination with the courthouse's central security network. This would enhance staff safety and allow the Sheriff's Office to respond more effectively to any security threat.

Options

Option 1 – Implement Full Security and Safety Package (Recommended)

- Fund and install new magnetometer and screening station.
- Consolidate to a single monitored public entrance.
- Include exterior porch extensions in renovation design and grant request.
- Conduct assessment of court office doors and install electronic access/lockdown systems.

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Option 2 – Partial Implementation

- Replace screening equipment and address exterior door issues but defer office security systems until additional funding is available.

Option 3 – No Action

- Maintain current conditions.
- Leaves unresolved code deficiencies and recognized security vulnerabilities.

Fiscal Impact

- **Magnetometer and screening station:** Estimated \$50K, county funded—currently being advertised for bids.
- **Exterior porch and egress improvements:** Included as part of a state grant request of \$500K for historic courthouse preservation.
- **Electronic access and lockdown systems:** No estimate at this time, subject to vendor assessment. Will request AOC funding support.

Recommendation

It is recommended that Giles County proceed with **Option 1**, implementing the full package of courthouse security and safety improvements in coordination with the requested grant for courthouse renovations. This comprehensive approach will ensure compliance with safety codes, enhance protection for court personnel and the public, and align with current standards for courthouse design and operation.

Submitted 23 Oct 2025

A blue ink signature of G. S. Stowe, written in a cursive style.

G. S. Stowe
Giles County Executive

A blue ink signature of Joe Purvis, written in a cursive style.

Joe Purvis
Giles County Sheriff