



# FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **Oversight Task Force holds first meeting for looking toward next legislative session**

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JACKSON – Just a few weeks after Gov. Tate Reeves signed Senate Bill 2795 to make early parole eligibility possible for hundreds of inmates in the Mississippi Department of Corrections, an oversight task force started Friday discussions on what further improvements it will recommend to lawmakers for the 2022 legislative session.

The Corrections and Criminal Justice Oversight Task Force, established in 2015 by House Bill 585, held its first meeting since the end of the 2021 legislative session to discuss priorities for its next report to the Legislature concerning recommended improvements. The Task Force plans to submit its report in the fall.

Among topics to consider for recommending at the Capitol, providing state-issued identification cards to persons being released from custody back into the communities received significant discussion. Also high on the Task Force's agenda is addressing job training during incarceration for better chance of employment and success after release.

15<sup>th</sup> Circuit Judge Prentiss Harrell, who serves as the Task Force chairman, said stopping the cycle of people returning to prison is a major goal.

“There was a period in our time when as much as 80 percent of people that out of our system ended up going back. If we can get these people employment, good opportunities in their communities, they can be advanced to this re-entry court,” Harrell said. “Most of these people are younger. Most of them have had poor, if any, educational background, and most of them come from broken homes.”

The 15-member Task Force appointed three subcommittees to closely study specific details of 1. Identification; 2. Sex offender issues; and 3. Habitual offenders and juveniles and report back to the full committee on their findings. The meeting also featured a new addition of Eddie Spencer, appointed by Gov. Reeves as an advocate for offenders and their families, to the position added in 2020.

The Task Force, meeting at the Mississippi Supreme Court Carroll Gartin Justice Building, unanimously re-appointed Harrell as its chairman.

“The committee that we’re involved with now is from a cross section of different professional groups that bring their everyday experiences and commitment to improving the criminal justice system and criminal reform matters,” Harrell said. “First and foremost we are going to re-advance the re-entry program, but there are other matters we will have committees look at and will advance these ideas.”

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