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MDOC Commissioner Cain Probes Inmate Education with Community College Officials and Lawmakers

PERKINSTON, MS – New Corrections Commissioner for the state of Mississippi, Burl Cain, traveled to the Coast Wednesday to meet with educators and lawmakers at the Perkinston Campus of Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College. The summit addressed what vocational education courses would better equip prisoners to succeed in the workplace once they're released.

House Corrections Committee Chairman Kevin Horan from Grenada and Rep. Kevin Felsher of Biloxi convened a meeting with MGCCC officials and Commissioner Cain primarily to capitalize on the recent issuance of Pell Grants to educate prisoners. Federal Pell grants pay for college tuition.

Chairman Horan said, "We can improve getting prisoners ready for the outside world with these tuition grants. This is a game changer for re-entry training plus the CARE's Act money will provide much of the technology."

"These Pell grants are a win-win for the taxpayer, inmates, and their families," added Rep. Felsher. "MGCCC is one of two Mississippi colleges and one of only 131 across the nation to be awarded the privilege to use Pell Grants. And it would be good if we could marry MDOC with our community colleges and help them with workforce development."

MDOC Commissioner Cain said Mississippi has a dire recidivism rate. "Within five years, 77 percent of our prisoners return to prison because their work skills were not enough to keep a job." He added that the Pell grant program is a huge opportunity to cut costs. "We need this

training and skills in the prison to cut costs because not only do classes keep prisoners focused and calm, we need the training so they can train other prisoners to help us run the prison.”

Cain summed up the meeting by challenging MGCCC Drs. Johnathan Woodward and Cedric Bradley along with Dean Brock Clark to produce flexible training programs for prisoners. “Figure out how to get us in your classes,” the Commissioner said, “and we’re going to school. Prisoners do change. They get better. And that’s why they call this ‘Corrections.’”

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