



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **MDOC Commissioner tightens security at Parchman Prison; promotes recruiting and better training**

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**Cleveland, MS** – In further efforts to tighten security at Mississippi’s maximum security State Penitentiary in Parchman, Corrections Commissioner Burl Cain announces that the long-abandoned Back Gate of the sprawling 18,000-acre prison will once again be reopened and guarded for the first time since 2017.

“The Back Gate,” said the Commissioner, “was unmanned years ago mainly because of budget and staffing cuts. Then it became a hole in the perimeter through which contraband flowed into the prison, allowing in drugs, alcohol, tobacco, cellphones, you name it. Contraband makes all prisons unsafe and puts inmates and guards at risk by giving gang leaders power to control cellblocks and commit violence. Governor Reeves told MDOC in January to ‘restore order and safety’ and bring justice to those who commit violence, and that’s exactly what we’re doing.”

Commissioner Cain traveled to Cleveland, Mississippi, at the request of Corrections Committee member and state Sen. Sarita Simmons of Cleveland and Rep. Abe Hudson of Shelby. In addition to security, Simmons and Hudson want Parchman’s Back Gate reopened as a recruiting incentive to hire more correctional officers from west of the prison.

“Some individuals,” reported Senator Simmons, “have to drive an additional 30 miles around to the Front Gate to go to work. There is a limited workforce in the area and issues such as this should not make the job more complicated. For security purposes, the Back Gate guard house should have never been closed. Commissioner Cain and I agreed that these issues must be addressed. In addition, we hope to see an increase in personnel as a result of correcting this issue.”

Added Representative Hudson, “I have been vocal about my displeasure for the back gate being closed that would allow my constituents in House District 29 who work there to have a higher quality of life. Opening the back gate will facilitate much shorter commutes for my constituents who are employees of MDOC plus it will allow them quicker access to respond to any emergencies. We need to do whatever we can to make Parchman a model prison and a good employer in our community. This does not fix everything, but it’s a step in the right direction.”

Simmons and Hudson serve together on legislative committees addressing drug policies and agriculture.

The Commissioner commended both for their leadership, adding, “Leadership at the prison level is key. We are launching innovative training programs particularly geared at middle-level managers, teaching them how to lead people without driving them off. That’s a big reason why MDOC became severely understaffed so we’re changing the culture on how we treat both inmates and officers. Everybody wants to be treated respectfully and MDOC is going to become a model of that.”

MDOC is currently in a recruiting drive offering \$40,000+ pay packages for correctional officers. More than 100 correctional officers have been hired since Cain became Commissioner.

At the meeting, Indianola Mayor Steve Rosenthal asked Commissioner Cain, “Parchman is a big part of what goes on in Sunflower County. What are the requirements for applicants?”

“First, if they meet the requirements,” answered Cain, “we can have them on the payroll the very next day. All that’s required is a High school diploma or GED and no felonies. That’s it. And even if a person doesn’t qualify to become a correctional officer, I’m working to open up maintenance jobs for just about anyone.”

For more information, click on the “Job Search” tab at [mdoc.ms.gov](http://mdoc.ms.gov) or call MDOC Job line toll-free at 1-866-783-9359.

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**Media note: Attached are photos of the Back Gate at the Mississippi State Penitentiary at Parchman and the posted warning sign that appears at the Back Gate.**

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