



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Contact:** Office of Communications  
**Phone:** (601) 359-5701, 359-5608  
**E-mail:** [MDOCOfficeofCommunications@mdoc.state.ms.us](mailto:MDOCOfficeofCommunications@mdoc.state.ms.us)

### MDOC TURNS CONTRABAND TOBACCO INTO COMMUNITY AND INMATE HELP

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**JACKSON, MS** – For the first time in 10 years, Mississippi prison inmates who smoke will be able to do so legally on February 1, 2021. Corrections Commissioner Burl Cain is turning the negative of smoking into something positive for the state’s 21 prisons and other facilities.

“Inmates who smoke are smoking anyway,” said the Commissioner, “but they’re having to smuggle in tobacco to do it, which is illegal, and it’s even more illegal because state law prohibits smoking in state buildings. That compromises our Corrections officers and staff and puts them at risk to either break the law by allowing the smoking or to put themselves in danger by enforcing the rule. By selling the same cigarettes that are allowed to free people, we are breaking the contraband tobacco trade, designating smoking areas outside, clearing the air inside for the majority of inmates who don’t smoke, reducing inmate contraband violations, and recouping for taxpayers some of the dollars it takes to run prisons.”

Profits from prison tobacco sales will fund MDOC’s Re-entry Program by buying simulators and computer programs to teach parole-eligible men and women inmates the skills for truck driving, welding, backhoe, caterpillar and dragline operations, and in oil and pipeline work. The tobacco sales will also fund more remedial courses so inmates can achieve a high-school diploma, passing the HiSET (High School Equivalency Test) and begin college course work.

Name brand cigarettes will be sold at current prices in the prisons’ canteens where inmates buy snacks and toiletries. Cigars and smokeless tobacco products will also be sold.

“Inmates who smoke now not only are breaking laws and losing a chance at early release,” added MDOC Deputy Commissioner Jay Mallett, “but also they are paying as much as \$500 a pound to do it. The smokers will save money and the state will make money.”

Prison superintendents and wardens will designate smoking areas outdoors in compliance with state and federal law.

According to the American Nonsmokers' Rights Foundation and other websites, 27 other state correctional departments, including New York, California and Illinois, allow smoking outdoors on prison grounds with 15 also allowing the use of other tobacco products.

**Media note:**

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