

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: Nov. 16, 2018
Contact: Office of Communications,
(601) 359-5608, 359-5689 or 359-5289
MDOCOfficeofCommunications@mdoc.state.ms.us

Commissioner Hall's statement on Gov. Bryant's FY2020 Budget Recommendation for Corrections

The following is a statement from Corrections Commissioner Pelicia E. Hall regarding Gov. Phil Bryant's Executive Budget Recommendation for Fiscal Year 2020 specific to corrections:

"I applaud Gov. Bryant for his support of criminal justice reform in our state. After he signed the criminal justice reform package in 2014, Mississippi reduced its prison population, with more prison space now reserved for violent offenders. I agree with Gov. Bryant that we need to continue to reform our correctional and criminal justice systems.

Raising the entry-level pay for correctional officers, hiring more officers, providing funds for workforce training programs for our incarcerated population, and repairing Unit 29, the prison unit housing our highest risk incarcerated persons, will go a long way in achieving more reform.

A recent survey among corrections officials shows that Mississippi's starting pay at \$2,075 per month for correctional officers is the lowest in the country. Low pay undoubtedly is a contributing factor to our critical staffing shortage in security. The agency has taken steps to hire more people as quickly as it can, but without a realignment, we fear our staffing level will continue to drop.

The MDOC currently needs to hire 500 more correctional officers for the safety of staff and employees and 100 more probation and parole agents for community supervision. Because of this, I am thankful that Gov. Bryant recognizes hiring more officers is a major priority for corrections. As I attend the National Directors Conference in California this week hosted by the Association of State Correctional Administrators, we recognize that staffing is an issue in most of the corrections departments, and we are engaging in conversations to address recruitment and retention as an association.

Further, this administration is focused on meaningful rehabilitation both inside and outside prison walls. As Gov. Bryant said, employment for persons leaving prison is key to keeping them out of prison. Putting money into workforce training programs will make a big difference.

I thank Gov. Bryant for what we have accomplished in reforming our criminal justice and correctional systems under his leadership. I am most thankful for his bringing even more awareness to the issues we face. The future of corrections in Mississippi depends on addressing them as he points out in his budget recommendation. Working together, we will continue to move corrections forward."