



IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Contact: Office of Communications
Phone: (601) 359-5289, 359-5608, 359-5689
E-mail: MDOCOfficeofCommunications@mdoc.state.ms.us

Housing needs pending for remaining Parchman Unit 29 inmates

JACKSON, MISS. – The Mississippi Department of Corrections still must find housing for 625 maximum security inmates at Unit 29 of the Mississippi State Penitentiary at Parchman following the completion of moving 375 inmates to a nearby private prison.

“It is important to continue to address housing and infrastructure needs for the most violent offenders,” Commissioner Pelicia E. Hall said Monday. “Moving the 375 inmates to the Tallahatchie County Correctional Facility in Tutwiler provided some relief to an overstressed system. However, there are additional close custody inmates at Unit 29.”

Up to 1,000 inmates usually are assigned to the unit, which can house up to 1,500 inmates.

The MDOC’s FY 2021 budget request of \$419,110,853 includes \$22,522,280 for significant improvements to Unit 29.

“This facility, originally constructed in 1980 and renovated in 1996, has become unsafe for staff and inmates due to age and general deterioration,” Commissioner Hall said in her budget letter dated Aug. 30, 2019. The request is also consistent with previous years’ requests for additional funding to address staffing, infrastructure and other agency needs.

The MDOC cannot move the remaining inmates to the vacant Walnut Grove Correctional Facility in Leake County because the department lacks the staff and resources to operate the former private prison. The agency is experiencing critical understaffing at its three state prisons and needs at least 1,000 more officers for its current facilities. The number of officers has continued to dwindle as the agency’s pay has not kept pace with industry salaries and other professions.

The 23 percent increase in the department’s FY 2021 budget request also includes \$8,349,913 for a realignment and \$35,554,893 to fill 800 vacant positions at the three prisons. The realignment request is to move the current starting salary for correctional officers from \$25,650.41 to \$30,369.82, based on the average hiring salary in the four neighboring states.

“While we thank the Legislature for a 3 percent increase effective July 1, 2019, Mississippi’s salaries are still the lowest in the country,” Commissioner Hall said.

Additional correctional officers would allow the department to provide adequate coverage for its incarcerated population, Commissioner Hall said. The prison population on Monday was 18,895 inmates.

“Though I am no longer going to be corrections commissioner, I will still advocate for adequate funding for the Mississippi Department of Corrections,” said Commissioner Hall, whose last day on the job is this week.