



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Inmate Graduates Are Step Closer to Health Care Careers

JACKSON (Mar 31) – When COVID decimated the ranks of front-line medical workers, nursing schools ramped up programs to replenish their ranks. Mississippi Department of Corrections Commissioner Burl Cain seized the opportunity to match the needs of hospitals with the needs of soon-to-be-paroled inmates to get high-paying jobs on the outside.

Friday in Flowood, 26 female inmates received their “White Coats” and certificates upon completing the first such re-entry program at the Mississippi Department of Corrections Community Work Center. They finished coursework in a program offered by the Mississippi School of Health Services and Careers. Three additional participants received their certificates in advance Wednesday just prior to their releases.

Of Friday’s participants, two graduates completed the Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) course, 12 were in Phlebotomy, and 12 were in Medical Billing and Coding. The graduates’ next step will be taking exams leading to certifications and licenses in their chosen areas of healthcare. MDOC Works, formerly known as MPIC, will also deposit \$50 in each graduate’s inmate banking account.

Deputy Commissioner Bradley Lum, who leads MDOC’s Workforce Development Division, said making positive opportunities happen for inmates after their release is part of the motivation for the program.

“Without question, this is important to give inmates opportunities to complete upward mobility with job skills. This is crucial to providing our entire system a vantage point (for inmates) to say ‘Hey, I can leave incarceration and go out and get those types of jobs,’ ” Lum said, adding that MDOC is working to bridge the gap between changing the culture in prisons and making a path to inmates’ success (after release).

The educational programs were provided free of charge to the inmates and at no cost to MDOC Works through Coronavirus State and Local Recovery Funds and a federal award to Accelerate Mississippi by the U.S. Department of Treasury. Helping ex-Offenders Prepare for Employment (HOPE) is funded in part by the U.S. Department of Labor WIOA funds by a sub-award from the South Central Mississippi Works.

Inmate Shelia Sherrod, the highest-scoring student in the CNA class, has wanted to pursue a career in health care and was inspired by her sister who previously worked as a CNA for more than 25 years. Sherrod is expected to be released in July after five years of incarceration and plans to pursue her career in Ridgeland.

“This means so much to me because I want to be in a career where I can help people who can’t help themselves. This is something that I really wanted and we had some great teachers,” Sherrod said. “This is a great class and I encourage other women to take it. I appreciate Commissioner (Burl) Cain for making this opportunity possible.”

Inmate Courtney Barnett was the highest scorer in the Plebotomy class and is looking forward to her expected release in July and plans to start her career in Oxford. “I am excited to have gotten this to further my education and I am glad I have this under my belt,” Barnett said. “I have always wanted to be in health care.”

The School’s goal is to ensure students complete their course work in a timely effort, pass all licensure exams and provide a career path that ensures their success in the student's chosen career.

Video Link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Plfbp0Pzvc>

Media note:

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