FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: **January 20, 2021**
Contact: **Office of Communications**
Phone: **(601) 359-5701, 359-5608**
E-mail: **MDOCOfficeofCommunications@mdoc.state.ms.us**

MDOC sanitization efforts making Mississippi prisons among safest for COVID-19

JACKSON, MS (Jan 20) – With 343,000 U.S. inmates testing positive for COVID-19 and over 2,100 dying from the virus, Mississippi's 17,000 prisoners are among the safest from the virus according to comparable figures in other states and those compiled by inmate-advocacy group, the Marshall Project. Mississippi Department of Corrections has registered 1,383 COVID-positive inmates, which is 32 times less than the nation's most infected prison systems, California and federal prisons, each with 44,000 prisoners who've tested positive for COVID-19.

But the most critical figure of all –inmate COVID-19 deaths– stands at 21 in Mississippi, the lowest number by far of COVID-related deaths in southern states, compared with Florida at 204 deaths; Texas at 177; and Georgia at 87. Mississippi's inmate COVID-19 death rate is .1% of the state's 17,000-inmate population, which is half of Florida's and Georgia's .2% and below Texas' .15%.

"This is proof," said MDOC Commissioner Burl Cain, "that we made the right decision in immediately buying, installing and using sanitization equipment in every area of our prisons as quickly as we could. The temptation had been to wait on thousands of kits to test 17,000 inmates but testing and results would have taken weeks during which the virus could have spread like wildfire. Therefore, we started sanitizing as if everyone had the virus. In comparison to other states, our decision was correct to immediately take action with sanitization."

MDOC continues to employ several comprehensive and aggressive sanitizing measures in Mississippi prisons, including:

1. Suspending visitation to prevent visitors from infecting inmates as per CDC and MSDH guidelines;
2. Suspending prisoner movements barring exceptional circumstances;
3. Disinfecting with Electrostatic Sanitizing Sprayers in all buildings, cellblocks, kitchens and dining areas;
4. Installing hospital-type industrial ultraviolet sterilization lights;

5. Operating portable UV sterilizers and hand wand UV sterilizers;
6. Installing air purifiers;
7. Operating walk-through sanitization stations that mist inmates and staff with a 75-percent alcohol solution as per CDC guidelines;
8. Replacing uniforms, bedding, pillow cases, and mattresses as needed;
9. Distributing 60,000 reusable masks in addition to 250,000 donated single-use paper masks;
10. Enforcing masks;
11. Enforcing hand sanitizing;
12. Enforcing social distancing;
13. Testing all Corrections officers, administration staffers, medical workers, maintenance crewpersons, canteen workers, and vendors for temperature and symptoms when they enter the prison; and,
14. Exploring the reopening of standby prisons to allow for more social distancing.

On January 12, 2021, the Marshall Project reported that Mississippi had risen to 10th safest prison system in the 50 states in terms of COVID-19 infections (plus the federal system). In comparison to Mississippi's 21 inmate COVID deaths, surrounding states Alabama reported 54; Tennessee, 35; Arkansas, 51; and Louisiana, 31. In Mississippi, cause of death determinations are made by local coroners—independent of MDOC.
[https://www.themarshallproject.org/2020/05/01/a-state-by-state-look-at-coronavirus-in-prisons as updated Jan 12, 2021].

Media note:
https://www.facebook.com/MississippiDepartmentOfCorrections/
https://twitter.com/MS_MDOC