



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: Dec. 4, 2015
Contact: Grace Simmons Fisher, (601) 359-5608
E-mail: gfisher@mdoc.state.ms.us

Citizens to Have Input On How Money Is Spent for Inmates' Benefits

JACKSON - Two citizens and representatives from the Offices of the State Auditor and State Treasurer are starting work to help the Mississippi Department of Corrections determine how to spend a special fund created years ago to benefit inmates.

The Inmate Welfare Fund Committee was expanded from seven to nine members to include non-MDOC personnel under a new law that took effect July 1, 2015.

Profits from the commissary and inmate telephone call commissions are deposited in the Inmate Welfare Fund and are used to pay for services, supplies and equipment toward inmates' educational, recreational and programmatic needs. As of June 30, the fund had approximately \$1.2 million available for expenditures.

"This is the first time MDOC will have input from not only an inmate's family member, but also a citizen whom we know from the governor's recent prison task force is not shy about speaking her mind," Commissioner Fisher said referring to the Rev. Gene Henderson and Attorney Constance Slaughter-Harvey, both of whom he appointed to the committee. "I can tell from the first meeting that this group will be engaged, and I look forward to its input."

The group held its first meeting on Nov. 12.

In addition to Henderson and Slaughter-Harvey, Deputy Treasurer Laura Jackson and Performance Audit Division Director Sam Atkinson are members outside MDOC.

Henderson and Slaughter-Harvey said they welcome having a say in determining what types of items should be spent for inmates' benefits.

"Unfortunately, people we love make bad choices and must pay the consequences," Henderson said. "When that happens, everyone in the family suffers. I am just learning about the Inmate Welfare Fund and understand its purpose is to provide resources and services to inmates that

- more -

the state cannot or does not provide. My goal is to help insure that these funds are used in the best interest for those this fund has been established to help.”

Said Slaughter-Harvey: “It is unfair to the inmate and to taxpayers to have companies profit at our expense, so we have already started looking at the exorbitant prices charged for basic necessities. Too much of this leads to corruption which causes taxpayers to lose faith in the system and leaders. As usual, we will encourage citizen input.”

Henderson, of Brandon, is past president of the Mississippi Baptist Convention and former longtime pastor of First Baptist Church in Brandon.

Slaughter-Harvey served on the task force Gov. Phil Bryant created last year to review MDOC’s contracts. The five-member task force completed its work earlier this year. An attorney and a former assistant secretary of state, she is president of the Legacy Foundation.

The committee’s duties also include conducting an annual needs assessment of the Inmate Welfare Fund and evaluating proposals for administering the inmate canteen.

MDOC members are Deputy Commissioners Jerry Williams and Christy Gutherz; and the three state prisons’ leaders, Superintendents Earnest Lee of the Mississippi State Penitentiary at Parchman, Ron King from Central Mississippi Correctional Facility, and Jacquelyn Banks of South Mississippi Correctional Institution.

####