

# FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **First Resource Fair at SMCI aimed at Helping Offenders Adjust to Life after Release**

JACKSON - On Thursday, for the first time inmates at South Mississippi Correctional Institution will be able to talk face to face with representatives from businesses and organizations they likely will need after their release from prison.

The Resource Fair will be available to approximately 100 inmates in the pre-release program from 8 a.m. until noon at the Leakesville prison. They will be able to browse among tables set up for 16 participants, including Trustmark Bank, Ingalls Shipbuilding, Mar-Jac Poultry, Pine Belt Mental Health, WIN Job Center, and Jones County Junior College. MDOC representatives also will be on hand to provide information.

Commissioner Pelicia E. Hall said the fair is consistent with the agency's renewed efforts to provide meaningful rehabilitation to reduce recidivism. "This is another example of our efforts to help inmates have a better chance at success upon release," Hall said. "Through this and many other programs, we will continue to find ways to help inmates prepare for reintegration into society. Providing programs like this goes a long way toward helping offenders hopefully lead productive lives and reduce their chances of returning to the prison system."

Pre-Release Program Director Lisa L. Herndon modeled the fair after a similar program at the federal prison in Yazoo County. Herndon plans to hold a fair every six months.

"We are providing this information to these offenders in hopes of giving them options on what can be done to assist them when they are released from prison," Herndon said. "Hopefully, they will take this information and see that they have others ways of taking care of their needs instead of breaking the law."

In designing the fair, Herndon said she tried to put herself in an inmate's shoes. "I tried to imagine if I were about to be released, what kind of information would I need. What would I need to know in starting my life again in society," Herndon said. "Many inmates have been in prison a long time and they will need to know how to create a resume, where to look for employment, setting up a bank account, getting a driver's license or state I.D. or mental health services. The world is a lot different than when many of them went into prison."

William Duncan, a banker and community re-investment coordinator for Trustmark Bank, plans to participate in the fair.

"This is a great opportunity for the inmates to get off on the right path when they are released," Duncan said. "So many things have changed in banking. We will provide information to help them set up accounts and be financially literate. An important key for their success will be understanding their credit and hopefully they will not fall into bad situations that would lead them back to prison."

Kimberly Taylor, program coordinator in the probation and parole office covering Greene, George, and Jackson counties, said there are a lot of details offenders need to know after release.

"This is a great opportunity for them to have this information ahead of time because they will be going into a different world than what they previously knew," Taylor said.