

For Immediate Release

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MDOC holds mock job fairs to prepare Pre-Release participants for life after prison

JACKSON – Incarcerated individuals at the Central Mississippi Correctional Facility in Rankin County are getting a chance to practice at job hunting during a mock job fair today in readiness for their release later this year.

The “Future is Now!” Mock Job Fair is from 10 a.m. until 2 p.m. in the Youthful Offender Unit’s Visitation area. Sixty individuals within three to six months of release will meet one-on-one with representatives from 10 businesses and/or organizations, including Ingalls Shipbuilding, Lowe’s, Pepsi, DG Foods, PeopleReady, Veterans Affairs, Hinds Community College, Hinds Behavior Health Services, and Families First for Mississippi.

“They are to come prepared as though they are going to do an actual job interview,” said Viscia R. Pointer, CMCF Pre-release director. “They will put their best foot forward while practicing the skills they have learned in the Pre-Release program. This will be the first interview many of the participants have had in several years.”

Preparing individuals to find employment once they are released from prison has been a priority of Commissioner Pelicia E. Hall’s administration. As such, in addition to the department using the Smart Start curriculum in the prison system’s programs, she also has emphasized the importance of partnering with agencies and businesses to expand re-entry programs and services during and after incarceration.

“We know that employment is a critical piece for successful reintegration,” Commissioner Hall said. “I commend my staff for finding ways to do more with less, but adequate funding is key for successful reentry programs.”

Pointer said through networking, the agency has joined forces with outside agencies. “We appreciate businesses like Torrid and Goodwill as well as staff who donate clothing to our participants so that they may be prepared for the workforce,” she said. “We are committed to

addressing as many obstacles to finding employment prior to being released. We make it a point to equip released participants with a folder full of resources and a plan for success.”

Mock job fairs are among the various new activities at the MDOC since it expanded its Pre-Release program to each of the three state prisons. The curriculum focuses on resume writing and job interviewing strategies.

A mock job fair was held Jan. 10 at the South Mississippi Correctional Institution (SMCI) in Leakesville, with some of the same companies and/or organizations participating. The event involved 40 incarcerated individuals and 11 vendors. A third one is planned Feb. 28 at the Mississippi State Penitentiary at Parchman.

“Holding mock job fairs will educate incarcerated persons on how to properly conduct themselves during job interviews,” said LaShetta Wilder, director of Re-Entry and Pre-Release. “This event will increase confidence as well as teach participants the importance of preparing for an interview. The incarcerated individuals learn the importance of having much needed documents such as Social Security cards, a birth certificate and other critical documents when seeking employment.”

Employers also benefit in that they can recruit from a skilled labor pool among those being released, Wilder said.

Lisa Herndon, director of Pre-Release at SMCI, said individuals in the Pre-Release program are instructed to be forthcoming about their history when job hunting.

“First and foremost, we emphasize being honest on their application as it relates to their felony conviction,” Herndon said. “Employers do not like surprises. I wish I could say it’s going to be easy to get a job as a felon, but it’s not. However, it is possible with persistence and many employers who open their doors to those with criminal records take advantage of the federal Work Opportunity Tax Credit.

“Mrs. Elisha Booth, center coordinator for Families First, said there was no way she was going to miss the SMCI mock job fair. “I’m willing to help in any way I can to give people second chances and that’s what we do at Families First. We give people second chances. Everyone isn’t a bad person. Even though they’ve made bad decisions in their life. They just need a second chance and some people are actually willing to change their life.”