

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Contact: Office of Communications
Phone: (601) 359-5289, 359-5608
E-mail: MDOCOfficeofCommunications@mdoc.state.ms.us

MDOC plans to offer more housing for re-entry

JACKSON, MISS. - The Mississippi Department of Corrections is offering more housing for individuals eligible for release from prison, but don't have an approved place to stay.

The department is increasing the number of beds from 120 to 310.

"We recognize that it is more fiscally responsible to spend money on a \$20 transitional bed versus an incarceration bed," Commissioner Pelicia E. Hall said.

The cost of a transitional bed is at least half that of the average cost of a state-operated bed.

Since July 1, 2014, the department has been required by law to contract for at least 100 re-entry beds for parolees, probationers and others on post-release supervision who lack approved housing.

In addition to New Way Mississippi Inc. of Jackson and Crossroads Outreach Ministries of Madison, three more contractors were added this spring following a bid process. They are the Center for Independent Learning-Friendship Connection in Jackson, Sober Living Residential in Meridian, and Mississippi Offender Re-entry Experience, or MORE, in Hinds County.

The vendors and MDOC employees responsible for helping individuals with re-entry, including case managers, program coordinators and probation and parole agents, met several weeks ago at the Central Mississippi Correctional Facility in Rankin County. A probation and parole agent is assigned to each transitional facility.

"We have been talking about this for years and just didn't have that push until now," Deputy Commissioner Christy Gutherz said of funding for additional transitional housing. "Under Commissioner Hall's leadership, we now have the resources to get it going."

The vendors involved have 70 years of combined experience in helping people, Gutherz noted during the meeting.

Vickie DeMoney of Crossroads Ministries said she is thankful to be a part of the transitional group. "We are not a halfway house," said DeMoney, whose organization celebrated 10 years in 2018. "We are about restoration."

DeMoney said Crossroads Ministries focuses on job skills, conflict resolution and building morale. "Instead of feeling institutionalized, we want them to be independent. We want them to know their life has purpose," DeMoney said. "Transitional homes are needed. We are committed to making a difference in women's lives."

Larry Perry said New Way, which started in 1998 and has worked with MDOC since 2010, serves men and women, many of whom have substance abuse issues. He noted that success requires a deep commitment to the programs offered. "When a person comes out in transition mode, they are more likely to be successful," Perry said. "We take many who have nowhere else to go and are still fighting their addictions."

Courtney Boutwell said M.O.R.E. offers counseling and employment resources in addition to housing in taking a holistic approach to individuals' transition. Boutwell said she appreciated the opportunity to speak to the MDOC personnel.

Terrah Conerly of Sober Living said her organization is new. She spoke of being called to create the organization after having had a family member incarcerated in the past and another in prison now. "I felt that we needed to do something so I researched and found the opportunity," Conerly said. "We are looking forward to changing lives in Meridian."

Like others at the meeting, Loni Farrow, a program coordinator for MDOC in Union County, said she appreciated the face-to-face introductions and hearing about the resources. "This will put us in a better position to help more people because we have been struggling to find these kinds of resources," Farrow said. "I am very grateful for this."