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MDOC's Statement on the Recent Escape at SMCI

JACKSON - In response to media inquiries about the escape of Michael F. Wilson on July 5, 2018, at the South Mississippi Correctional Institution (SMCI), the Mississippi Department of Corrections issues the following statement:

The Mississippi Department of Corrections takes its responsibility to ensure public safety very seriously. It is always concerning when an individual escapes any correctional facility under its purview. At the center of that concern is capturing the individual without anyone being hurt.

While understaffing has not been directly attributed to the July 5 escape, it could be a contributing factor that ultimately affects public safety. The main challenges of the MDOC that have been voiced to lawmakers under this administration are staffing for its correctional facilities along with appropriate wages for correctional staff. The department is committed to finding ways to address the understaffing problem, but until the wages, the necessary security positions are restored, and working conditions of the correctional officers improve, the state correctional system will continue to be at a disadvantage in carrying out its public safety mission.

The department followed protocol, which includes notification of city, county, and state law enforcement, in the July 5 escape. The protocol is consistent with correctional standards nationwide. Procedurally, the MDOC always looks at what could be done better when it has an extraordinary occurrence, such as an escape. In that same vein, the department is always mindful of the people in the communities it serves and would never disregard and/or dismiss its responsibility for public safety. While naturally there are a lot of questions, ample time should be given for a full internal investigation to determine if there were operational failures. If the department finds, upon completion of that investigation, that any disciplinary

action is warranted or any operational changes are needed, then it will act accordingly. At all times, while conducting the internal investigation, the department is aware that any employee affected is entitled to due process.