

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Staffing shortage prompts MDOC to close SMCI unit; others likely

JACKSON – A severe staffing shortage is prompting the Mississippi Department of Corrections to close some units and move inmates elsewhere in the prison system.

Four hundred inmates have been moved from South Mississippi Correctional Institution (SMCI) in Greene County to other locations. The prison in Leakesville is authorized to house 3,082 inmates; today's population is 2,631.

“We likely will have to close some other units,” Commissioner Pelicia E. Hall said. “This is a necessary measure to address public safety concerns. We believe it is best for the safety of our staff and inmates. We also hope this is temporary because we want to fill all vacancies. We are aggressively recruiting.”

Agency recruiters are appearing at job and career fairs at local schools, community colleges, universities, community events, and the Governor's Job Fairs and visiting classrooms. Interview and Screening Days are held semimonthly at the state prisons. Fliers are emailed to colleges, universities, WIN Job Centers, and selected churches and associations. Letters are sent to community colleges and universities annually in April and December to attract graduates. Additionally, MDOC advertises on state websites other than its own, radio stations, and state vehicles and along state highways.

“While we recognize that the \$2,075-per-month starting salary is not as attractive as other jobs that pay more but are far less dangerous,” Commissioner Hall said, “we also now have more stringent requirements to be a correctional officer. We are recruiting a lot more on college campuses.”

In addition to seeking a more educated work force, MDOC also requires applicants to pass a polygraph exam in pre-employment screening.

The relocated inmates will be spread throughout the system, with some going to the 15 regional facilities and three private prisons.

MDOC is authorized to fill 2,028 positions among the three state prisons, SMCI, the Mississippi State Penitentiary and Central Mississippi Correctional Facility, under the current budget. Of that number, 435 positions are permitted at SMCI.

Staffing shortage is a common issue shared by both state and federal prisons. A story in *The Wall Street Journal* earlier this year highlighted staffing woes among the nation's 1,800 government-run prisons. Kansas, Maryland, and South Carolina are among the states making headlines recently about staffing of correctional officers.

“Staffing is definitely an ongoing issue corrections leaders talk about when we meet,” said Commissioner Hall, who is a member of the Association of State Correctional Administrators.