



MISSISSIPPI  
DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS  
OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS



# PRESS RELEASE

**Date:** April 3, 2015  
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## **Commissioner Fisher: Tough Choices Ahead For MDOC**

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JACKSON - Faced with the need to provide better pay to retain officers and improve morale, Corrections Commissioner Marshall Fisher said the Mississippi Department of Corrections will have to make tough choices under its new budget starting July 1.

Lawmakers approved a \$374 million budget for Corrections on Monday, less than the original \$390.5 million request. The agency's current budget is \$382.4 million for the year ending June 30, 2015.

"We are going to have to make some hard choices this year, choices that may not please many but will be necessary for the overall fiscal integrity of the agency," Fisher said. "Consolidating certain inmate work programs that are not cost effective is likely. Current pay for our rank and file officers is well below what it should be. I hope to address that."

Recent shakedowns that have netted both large and small shanks confirm the daily danger correctional officers face on the job, Fisher said. The starting pay for correctional officers is \$22,005.62 and \$25,718.70 for probation and parole officers.

In response to questions from lawmakers during his confirmation hearing Tuesday, Fisher said both a pay increase and hiring more officers are equally important. "But without a pay increase, I don't think we are going to recruit a lot of people, and we are short staffed," he said.

Turnover rate for correctional officers was 51 percent in 2014. Currently, at least 100 more correctional officers are needed, and nearly that many parole and probation officers are needed.

In addition to finding a way to increase pay for correctional, parole, and probation officers, Fisher said he also will require improved training. Academy training will increase from four to eight weeks for correctional officers. Firearms training for probation and parole and other criminal investigators will increase from once a year to four times a year.

Also, the age requirement to be a correctional officer will move from 18 to 21 years of age, Fisher said.

At Fisher's request, lawmakers approved removing the agency from under the state Personnel Board for one year. Fisher said the change is necessary as he reassesses the agency's needs as the number of inmates incarcerated drops and resources are shifted to accommodate an increase in the number of ex-

offenders being supervised. Also, the agency needs flexibility in following the requirements of House Bill 585, the comprehensive prison reform act.

“I commit to you that any personnel action taken by this agency to terminate the employment of any MDOC employee will follow the rules and regulations of the State Personnel Board with regard to due process and grievance procedures,” Fisher said in a letter to House Speaker Philip Gunn on Wednesday.

Fisher, whose 30-plus year law career includes being a police officer, a probation officer and a drug enforcement agent, is the agency’s newest corrections chief in more than a decade. Gov. Phil Bryant appointed him in January following the resignation of Christopher B. Epps, who is awaiting sentencing on corruption-related charges.

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