



MDOC Plans to Use Former Leake County Prison Site

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JACKSON – The Mississippi Department of Corrections is considering using the former Walnut Grove Correctional Facility site for other purposes, such as an alternative to incarceration or for re-entry.

With more mentally ill inmates than the state mental hospital and a large percentage of inmates with substance abuse problems, MDOC is refocusing its resources on rehabilitation. There are 3,194 mentally ill inmates and about 15,000 reporting substance abuse, including drug and alcohol use.

“We do not intend for the Walnut Grove site to go unused,” Commissioner Marshall Fisher said. “Just as we have formed a partnership with the Mississippi Department of Mental Health to assist us in supervising mentally ill inmates both inside and outside prison, we are strongly pursuing other ways to help inmates re-enter their communities in a meaningful way and remain out of prison.”

The former prison could be used also as a technical violation center, which was created under the comprehensive criminal justice reform legislation in 2014 as an alternative to incarceration. MDOC currently operates three such centers in Rankin, Leflore, and Simpson counties.

The building became vacant last week after MDOC moved the last of 900 prisoners to the state-run prisons. The department closed the private prison based on budget constraints and the reduced prison population. The agency announced the closure on June 10, well before the U.S. Department of Justice announced on Aug. 18 that it would be reducing the use of privately operated prisons.

“MDOC’s decision to close Walnut Grove is in no way connected to the U.S. Department of Justice’s decision nor is the closure the result of any advocacy group’s ‘victory,’” Fisher said. “When the prison closed, significant improvements had been made under Management & Training Corporation, and juvenile offenders were no longer being housed there. We believe enough significant improvements had been made that the consent decree providing oversight was no longer needed.”

Youthful offenders were removed from Walnut Grove in December 2012 and are now housed at the nationally recognized Youthful Offender Unit, which has won praise from groups like the ACLU.

MTC began operating Walnut Grove in 2012. It continues to operate three other private prisons in Mississippi (Marshall County Correctional Facility, East Mississippi Correctional Facility, and Wilkinson County Correctional Facility).