



PRESS RELEASE

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New Inmate Re-entry Facility Opens In Walnut Grove

(Jackson) – The Mississippi Department of Corrections (MDOC) today announced the opening of a new re-entry facility, the Walnut Grove Transition Center, located in the old Camo Kids garment factory building on the west side of Highway 35 South in Walnut Grove. The goal of the new facility is to provide opportunities to reduce recidivism by offering job training and placement, as well as housing for qualified inmates.

The Walnut Grove Transition Center will be operated by American Transition Services of Brandon under the direction of former MDOC commissioner Steve Puckett. House Corrections Committee Chairman Bennett Malone and MDOC commissioner Christopher Epps have been working to bring the 200 bed facility to fruition for over a year.

Offenders in the Walnut Grove Transition Center (WGTC) will be offered educational programs and alcohol and drug treatment while they are in the facility. The facility will provide housing with a dormitory layout. Offenders in the facility will have more privileges than those in a prison; however, offenders will be secured and supervised when not at work.

The WGTC will serve two populations; probationers sentenced to reside in a restitution center and earned release supervision offenders.

The restitution center portion of the facility will help relieve the backlog of offenders waiting to enter into the restitution program. Restitution centers are one of Mississippi's alternatives to conventional incarceration. There are currently four restitution centers located in Greenwood, Flowood, Jackson and Pascagoula. Offenders in the restitution program work in private sector jobs. Their wages are maintained by the center where they are distributed to victims for restitution, the courts to cover court costs and fines, to family for their support, to the offenders' accounts and to the center for room and board costs.

The other population that will be served at the center are offenders eligible for earned release supervision (ERS) that do not have an approved residence in Mississippi (ERS outside of the state is not permitted). When offenders have served 85% of their eligible sentence they may be released to a period of earned release supervision. During this transition time they are still classified as inmates but are released to an approved address to begin employment and re-establish themselves in the community.

Offenders without an approved address for ERS either remain in custody or go to the Mississippi Prison Industries Corporation Transition Center (MPICTC). The MPICTC has been successful obtaining employment for offenders and transitioning them back into society. It has served as a model in the development of the WGTC. ERS offenders in the WGTC will have their wages managed in the same manner as the restitution population.

Corrections officials and American Transition Services representatives have been in talks with local businesses to ensure that jobs will be available for the offenders in the center. Tyson Food Inc. and Peco Foods of Mississippi are among the employers that are willing to hire the facility's residents, with wages of more than \$8.00 per hour.

Commissioner Christopher Epps states, "Representative Malone and I have worked hard for this facility, because the successful transition of offenders back into the community and workforce is essential to reducing recidivism."

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