



# PRESS RELEASE

Date: October 8, 2009  
Contact: Tara Booth

Phone: (601) 359-5701  
Fax: (601) 359-5738

## Jackson and Harrison County Community Work Centers Receive American Correctional Association (ACA) Reaccreditation Recommendation

**Jackson**—Mississippi Department of Corrections Commissioner Christopher Epps today expressed his appreciation to the staff of the Jackson County Community Work Center and the Harrison County Community Work Center for their hard work and dedication in successfully demonstrating their ability to continue to meet nationally accepted correctional standards. Following an audit at both community work centers (CWC) by American Correctional Association (ACA) auditors, the Jackson County Community Work Center in Pascagoula and the Harrison County Community Work Center in Gulfport both received a recommended score of 100% on the mandatory standards and a recommended score of 100% on the non-mandatory standards.

“I commend Larry Hill and Nickie Simmons, commanders of the Jackson County and Harrison County Community Work Centers, and their staff for embracing this challenge and receiving a recommendation for ACA reaccreditation,” said Commissioner Epps. “This is indeed a triumphant day for the state of Mississippi and the Mississippi Department of Corrections.”

“I also want to thank MDOC Deputy Commissioner of Community Corrections Lora Cole, Region Three Director Jerry Williams, Branch Director Sonny Edwards, and Community Corrections ACA Accreditation Manager Bobby Welch for being ever so diligent in their work toward the ACA accreditation,” said Commissioner Epps.

The ACA auditing team arrived at Jackson County CWC on Monday, Oct. 5, and at the Harrison County CWC on Wednesday, Oct. 7. They spent four days reviewing all MDOC policies and procedures, touring the work centers, and interviewing staff and inmates at the work centers. To be awarded accreditation, the community work centers must comply with 100% of the 34 mandatory standards identified by ACA and comply with at least 90% of the 217 non-mandatory standards identified by ACA. The ACA Auditing team was comprised of two veteran correctional professionals. Debra Winston, Director of Community Corrections Services, from Cleveland, Ohio and Maria de los A. Colon, Correctional Consultant, from Caguas, Puerto Rico.

“It took a total team effort---clerical support, officers, supervisors, and directors, and the hard work paid off,” said Deputy Commissioner Lora Cole. “I truly appreciate the daily effort of the MDOC staff to maintain these high ACA standards.”

Individual accreditation awards last for 3 years; however, the process is designed to be continuous. Accreditation is a system to verify that correctional programs comply with national standards developed by the American Correctional Association. The ACA Standards Committee continually revises the standards based on changing practices, current case law, and correctional agency experiences. Approved standards reflect the view of correctional practitioners, architects, medical and legal experts. The advantages and benefits of accreditation are numerous and include:

- The assessment of a facility’s strengths and weaknesses;
- The identification of obtainable goals;
- The implementation of state of the art policies and procedures;
- The establishment of specific guidelines for daily operations;
- An aid in the defense of frivolous lawsuits;
- An increase in community support; and
- A higher level of staff professionalism and morale.

