



MISSISSIPPI
DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS
OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS



PRESS RELEASE

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Contact: Suzanne Singletary

Phone: (601) 359-5608
Fax: (601) 359-5624

Commissioner Epps Issues Rebuttal to Representative Flagg's Letter

Dear Legislative Members:

I am very appreciative for the letter from Representative George Flagg comparing costs between the Mississippi Department of Corrections and the Mississippi Adequate Education Program. During these difficult budgetary times, it is important to examine how the state distributes its limited resources. I write to provide you information you may find useful as you consider restoring cuts made to the budget of the Mississippi Department of Corrections.

Initially, it is important to note that the Department of Corrections has already taken significant steps to operate as efficiently as possible. In 2004, the department was removed from personnel board protection, and we reduced our total staff by 567. This reduced corrections' annual expenditures by \$15.6 million, saving the state a total of \$62.4 million over the last six years. We have restructured the state's debt on prison facilities owned by the state but operated by private companies, resulting in a \$10.3 million savings. By using every available technique to avoid recidivism, we have seen recidivism rates drop by 4%, providing \$8.3 million in cost avoidance.

Corrections remains a leader in operating efficiently, and during the current budgetary crisis, other agencies are looking to us for ways they, too, can operate at a lower cost. Attached to this letter is a document outlining the various policies the department has adopted to operate more leanly. All told, our cost-savings initiatives have already saved over \$107 million, and will continue to save going forward. Because corrections has spent the last five years making spending reductions, it is all the more difficult to make additional savings now.

Representative Flagg's letter also discusses the growth in spending on corrections and education. As an initial matter, I would ask you to remember that comparing per-prisoner and per-pupil spending is highly misleading. So long as we have criminals and house them in prisons, it will *always* cost more per prisoner than it does per student. Unlike students who leave at the end of the school day and return to homes and meals paid for by their families, prisoners remain in our facilities, in most cases, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, for months or years at a time. While they are in our facilities, the state pays for their basic needs, including food, clothing and medical care. The state also must pay a substantial sum to maintain custody and control of these prisoners by operating secure facilities, including surveillance technology and adequate numbers of corrections officers. Quite simply, comparing per-pupil and per-inmate costs does not compare apples to oranges.

Representative Flagg is correct that the annual cost per inmate has increased \$5,053 during the last 15 (fifteen) years, while the annual MAEP cost per student has increased \$2,550 during the same period. But it is not accurate to suggest that corrections spending has increased disproportionately to MAEP. Per-inmate spending has increased an average of **3.8% per year** (FY 2009 cost of \$13,828 - FY 1994 cost of \$8,775 = $\$5,053 / \$8,775 = 57.6\% / 15 \text{ years}$), while per pupil spending has averaged growth of

6.8% per year (FY 2009 cost of \$5,066 - FY 1994 cost of \$2,516 = \$2,550/ \$2,516 = 101.3%/15 years). Per-inmate spending has increased, but per-student spending has increased at a greater rate. When you consider per-inmate spending, I also ask you to remember this fact: *Mississippi already spends less per prisoner than any other state in America.* By using innovative technologies and techniques, and through an aggressive approach to cost-containment since 2004, our department has succeeded in performing this critical government function at a lower cost than any other state in the union.

For many years, our department has sought new ways to operate with maximum efficiency and we continue to do so today. Like all of state government, our budget has grown over the last fifteen years, but our cost per-inmate remains low relative to other states, and we constantly seek new ways to provide the best quality of service to the people of Mississippi at the lowest possible cost.

I look forward to working with you as Mississippi deals with our current budgetary difficulties.

Sincerely,

Christopher B. Epps, Commissioner
Mississippi Department of Corrections