



NEWS RELEASE

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Wilkinson and Jefferson County Community Work Centers Receive American Correctional Association (ACA) Recommendation

Jackson—Mississippi Department of Corrections Commissioner Christopher Epps today expressed his appreciation to the staff of the Wilkinson County Community Work Center and the Jefferson County Community Work Center for their hard work and dedication in successfully demonstrating their ability to meet nationally accepted correctional standards. Following an audit at both community work centers (CWC) by American Correctional Association (ACA) auditors, the Wilkinson County Community Work Center in Woodville and the Jefferson County Community Work Center in Fayette both received a recommended score of 100% on the mandatory standards and a recommended score of 99.4% on the non-mandatory standards.

“I commend both Walter Reed and Henry Norton, directors of the Wilkinson County and Jefferson County Community Work Centers, and their staff for embracing this challenge and receiving a recommendation for ACA accreditation,” said Commissioner Epps. “This is indeed a monumental day for the state of Mississippi and the Mississippi Department of Corrections.”

The ACA auditing team arrived at Wilkinson County CWC on Monday, April 28, and at the Jefferson County CWC on Wednesday, April 30. They spent four days reviewing all MDOC policies and procedures, touring the work centers, and interviewed staff and inmates housed at the work centers. To be awarded accreditation, the community work centers must comply with 100% of the 30 mandatory standards identified by ACA and comply with at least 90% of the 214 non-mandatory standards identified by ACA.

The ACA auditing team was comprised of two veteran correctional professionals. The ACA Auditor Chairperson, William O’Sullivan, is a correctional consultant from Mount Sterling, Illinois. O’Sullivan, who has 30½-years experience in corrections, has been an ACA auditor since 1999. O’Sullivan retired from the Illinois Department of Corrections after more than 30 years of service, the last 12 years serving as the warden of a 2,000-bed medium security facility in Mount Sterling. Previous to that assignment, he worked in facilities representing all custody levels — maximum, medium and minimum-security — work release, community corrections and parole.

“Both of these facilities are well-maintained and very clean,” said O’Sullivan. “We don’t find facilities in such excellent shape like these everywhere we go. The inmates are very positive about the staff, the program, and had no complaints, which is very unusual.”

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Joining O'Sullivan was Phoebe Johnson, a retired corrections professional from South Carolina. Johnson served as a warden at various levels of corrections, including work centers and minimum, medium and maximum-security facilities. Johnson has 26 years experience in corrections and has been an ACA Auditor since 1983.

Wilkinson County CWC and Jefferson County CWC are both currently in candidate status. The ACA auditing team will now report its findings to the Commission on Accreditation for Corrections (CAC), which will hold an accreditation panel hearing. At the CAC panel hearing in August 2003, it will be decided if these two CWC's are awarded accreditation.

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.

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