



PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Corrections Officials Report Progress On Agency Wide Accreditation Efforts

Jackson – Prison officials representing the Institutional and the Community Services divisions of the Mississippi Department of Corrections (MDOC) report that continued progress is being made by the department in its efforts to gain American Correctional Association (ACA) accreditation of its agency-wide operation. MDOC Commissioner Robert L. Johnson set a date of September 2002 for all three state prisons to be accredited. The Commissioner set an October 2002 date for all functions of Community Services, including probation, parole, intensive supervision program, community work centers and restitution centers to be accredited.

Bobby Welch, Commander of the George County Community Work Center stated, “A Community Services committee comprised of administrative staff members has developed and implemented an audit tool for accreditation compliance. The committee was formed to review and rewrite any standard operating procedures concerning Community Services, which failed to address pertinent accreditation standards. Each office and facility is currently conducting on-going self-audits to measure the progress being made toward achieving accreditation status.”

According to correctional experts, accreditation has many advantages. It includes the assessment of a facility’s strength and weakness. It identifies obtainable goals and aids in the implementation of state-of-the-art policies and procedures. Correctional practitioners also say that accreditation establishes specific guidelines for daily operations, aids in the defense of frivolous lawsuits, increases community support, and provides incentive for a higher level of staff professionalism and morale.

ACA accreditation is a rigorous process and is difficult to obtain. It signifies compliance with national standards in correctional operation and management and focuses on the policies and procedures related to correctional services, programs, administrative and fiscal controls, staff training and development, physical plant, safety and emergency procedures, sanitation, food service, rules and discipline. ACA accreditation is achieved through a series of reviews, evaluations, surveys and audits.

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Officer Juanita Walley, a 4-year employee at South Mississippi Correctional Institution (SMCI), who works at the front gate stated, "I feel that policies and procedures play a significant role in the accreditation process. We need ACA as a constant reminder of the importance of policies and procedures and their positive affect on administrative staff, inmates and officers. Additionally, ACA accreditation is significant because it places strong emphasis on cleanliness. Thanks to SMCI's involvement in the accreditation process, our institution looks great and it helps us take pride in our work!"

Gail Smith, FO III for Region II said, "ACA accreditation will create uniformity across the State of Mississippi and with other accredited correctional agencies. This management tool will reduce the possibility of lawsuits against the agency and will facilitate the agency's utilization of manpower and services. The accreditation process is one that provides guidelines aimed at the betterment of the agency, the officers, the offenders and the community."