



NEWS RELEASE

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Madison and Yazoo County Community Work Centers Receive American Correctional Association (ACA) Recommendation

Jackson—Commissioner Christopher Epps today expressed his appreciation to the staff of the Madison County Community Work Center and the Yazoo County Community Work Center for their hard work and dedication in successfully demonstrating their ability to meet nationally accepted correctional standards. Following a 2-day audit at the Madison County CWC in Canton by American Correctional Association (ACA) auditors, the CWC received a recommended score of 100% on the mandatory standards and a recommended score of 96.7% on the non-mandatory standards. In addition, the Yazoo County Community Work Center in Yazoo City received a recommended score of 100% on the mandatory standards and a recommended score of 95.2% on the non-mandatory standards.

“I commend both Valerie Buie and Walter Lockhart, directors of the Madison County and Yazoo 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 Madison County CWC on Monday, Oct. 7, and at the Yazoo County CWC on Wednesday, Oct. 9. 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, Phoebe Johnson, is a retired corrections professional from South Carolina where she was 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, serving as an Auditor Chairperson since 1985.

“One of the most important issues in a facility is quality of life,” said Johnson. “You could pass all of the standards and not pass the quality of life, which involves whether staff and inmate are safe and treated fairly. You all have a good quality of life here. You cannot achieve this [accreditation] or continue this without teamwork.”

(more)

Joining her was Plato Barnett, an auditor for the Arkansas Dept. of Community Corrections. Barnett, who has been in corrections for 11 years, has worked as a research specialist, compliance auditor and as an accreditation manager for Arkansas DOC.

“I must say when I was told this facility (Madison County CWC) was as 20 year old facility, this is one of the cleanest, neatest facilities I’ve been in.”

Madison County CWC and Yazoo 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 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.

The South Mississippi Correctional Institution (SMCI) received their Certificate of Accreditation Award from the American Correctional Association (ACA) in July. SMCI was the first state institution in its entirety to receive the prestigious designation. In addition, the Central Mississippi Correctional Facility (CMCF) in Pearl, Miss., received their recommendation for accreditation in September.

The Mississippi State Penitentiary in Parchman, Miss., is in candidate status. The institution is preparing for its official site visit and review from an ACA audit team later this year.

“I am confident that all of Community Corrections and Miss. State Penitentiary will receive recommendation for accreditation,” said Commissioner Epps. “This process is raising the professional standards of corrections in Mississippi and demonstrating that MDOC employees are themselves professionals in corrections.”

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