



PRESS Announcement

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Mississippi State Penitentiary Given Nod of Approval by American Correctional Association (ACA) Audit Team

Parchman - Commissioner Christopher Epps today expressed his appreciation to Superintendent Emmitt Sparkman and the staff of the Mississippi State Penitentiary (MSP) for their hard work and dedication in successfully demonstrating their ability to meet nationally accepted correctional standards. Following a five-day audit at MSP by American Correctional Association (ACA) auditors, the state institution located in Parchman, Miss., received a recommended score of 100% on the mandatory standards and a recommended score of 97.2% on the non-mandatory standards.

"I salute Superintendent Emmitt Sparkman and the staff at MSP for meeting this challenge and for making it possible for this great institution to receive this highly coveted ACA accreditation," said Commissioner Epps. "This truly is a historic day for the state of Mississippi and a signal honor for the Mississippi Department of Corrections. Suffice it to say, today is a proud moment for all the staff who worked many long hours to reach this hallmark."

The ACA auditing team arrived at MSP on Monday, Nov. 18. They reviewed all MDOC policies and procedures, interviewed MSP staff and inmates housed at the institution, and inspected all components of the prison's operation. MSP, the largest of the state's three public prisons, is located on approximately 16,000 acres of flat delta region land. The prison's current capacity is 5551 offenders. To be recommended for accreditation, MSP was required to comply with 100% of the mandatory standards identified by ACA and with at least 90% of the non-mandatory standards.

The ACA auditing team was comprised of four veteran correctional professionals. Kelly Ward, Chairperson of the audit team and currently a correctional consultant from St. Francesville, Louisiana, served with the Louisiana Department of Public Safety for 31 years. He served as warden at the Wade Correctional Center, an 1800-bed facility for nine years prior to his retirement in March 2002. Ward has been an ACA auditor since 1996. He holds distinction of Certified Corrections Executive and over the past six years has participated in 35 ACA audits involving both state and federal facilities.

Assisting Ward on the audit team were 25-year correctional veteran Bobby Lee Boone, Regional Director with the Oklahoma Department of Corrections, and 27-year correctional practitioner Gary G. Gremillion, Deputy Warden of Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections. Also serving on the audit team was Robert E. Ward, Institutional Division Director with the South Carolina Department of Corrections, a 17-year veteran of corrections.

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Boone has served as Warden of Oklahoma's Mack Alford Correctional Center, an 814-bed facility, since 1991 and has been actively involved with ACA for 18 years. Gremillion, who currently serves as Deputy Warden at Avoyelles Correctional Center, began auditing for ACA in 1995. He helped supervise an audit team that initiated the accreditation process in Louisiana. Ward, the Institutional Division Director for the South Carolina Department of Corrections, provides supervision in the daily operation of the state's nine male maximum and high security correctional facilities involving nearly 12,000 offenders. He is the current president-elect of the Southern States Correctional Association, an affiliate of the ACA.

MSP is 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 and decide if MSP is awarded accreditation.

"This recognition today proves that the employees of MSP are dedicated professionals that daily provide public safety based on national standards established by criminal justice professionals," said MSP Superintendent Emmitt Sparkman. "This recognition of professionalism personifies the true meaning of teamwork. I'm proud that the MSP staff has demonstrated its professionalism by having the entire institution receive recommendation for full accreditation."

Accreditation covers a 3-year period. 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 ACA in July. It was the first state institution in its entirety to receive the prestigious designation. ACA auditors recommended Central Mississippi Correctional Facility (CMCF) to receive accreditation in September. It, along with the Mississippi State Penitentiary, is in candidate status. The audit team's recommendation will be submitted to the Commission on Accreditation for final approval on the committee's recommendation for accreditation.

"I am confident that MSP and CMCF will receive accreditation by ACA," said Commissioner Epps. "This process is raising the professional standards of corrections in Mississippi and demonstrating that MDOC employees are themselves professionals in corrections."