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**JEFFERSON S. DUNN**  
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## Opinion/Editorial

By Jefferson S. Dunn

Commissioner, Alabama Department of Corrections

As commissioner of the Alabama Department of Corrections, I am convinced that real, fundamental, and lasting change cannot come to ADOC without first, improving the prison system's infrastructure as proposed by the Alabama Prison Transformation Initiative (APTI) bill currently before the Alabama Legislature.

As I reflect on the people who honorably serve the ADOC, I am encouraged by the commitment to the department's core values of professionalism, integrity and accountability by the ADOC team. However, I am sobered by the challenges facing the department: overcrowding coupled with understaffing; limited resources unable to keep up with increasing costs; and aging, worn facilities housing more than 22,700 inmates in a system designed for half that population.

One of the biggest obstacles preventing our team from overcoming our challenges is the prison system's outdated, outmoded, and overgrown infrastructure. This obstacle will be removed by passage of the APTI legislation.

The APTI is an ambitious plan designed to address ADOC's two main critical problems: overcrowding and understaffing. This two-headed monster hinders not only the department's ability to provide a reasonable level of safety and security for our staff and inmates, but also it prevents us from offering proven and effective rehabilitation services to the thousands of inmates who transition back into our communities every year. These services represent our best opportunity to help inmates become successful, law-abiding, contributing members of society.

The ADOC accepts the fiscal reality that there is not any "new" money to invest in Corrections. And, our aging infrastructure is consuming more and more of the state's limited resources, further hampering our ability to provide effective rehabilitation.

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With these realities before us, we have proposed to borrow \$800 million to build three large regional male facilities and one female facility to replace Tutwiler Prison for Women. In addition, we intend to close all but two of our male medium and maximum security facilities.

How will we pay for the project? We will consolidate 16 major facilities into six, significantly reducing overhead costs. Four of the six facilities will be new, energy efficient prisons using modern design and advanced correctional practices. New facilities can be operated at much lower costs and do not require as many security personnel to operate. In addition, new facilities will integrate rehabilitation and re-entry capabilities into the design. This will enable the department to fully realize our goal of reducing recidivism by giving inmates the skills needed to succeed in society and avoid returning to prison.

Last year ADOC spent \$32 million in overtime to make up for the low staffing levels at the state's correctional facilities. New facilities require fewer correctional officers to operate, and will enable the department to save approximately \$20 to \$21 million a year in overtime, and another \$17 to \$18 million a year in personnel costs. Also, ADOC will decrease the number of medical clinics from 16 to six and save approximately \$10 million each year in medical care costs. These estimates don't include savings from energy efficiency, reduced logistics, supply, and transportation costs. The point is this: ADOC has confidence in its ability to meet the estimated \$50 million per-year bond payment from the savings realized without asking taxpayers for new revenue.

I've heard concerns that this project is ripe for cronyism and corruption but we have put together a process to safeguard against those concerns. So, how will ADOC ensure that the citizens of Alabama will get a good return on their investment? As outlined in the pending legislation, we will create a management team of experts in the field of corrections, construction, engineering, architecture and more – all with proven track records of experience and success in their field. This team, in coordination with ADOC, will develop the specific project requirements necessary to both meet the needs of the department, and stay within the constraints of our state budget. ADOC will advertise for requests for proposals on the state website, open to any company who wishes to submit their qualifications and competitive proposal. All proposals will be evaluated against the specific project requirements and selected based on the best value for the state.

Throughout the process ADOC will be regularly reporting its progress to the Legislative Prison Oversight Committee. Also, the project management team will protect and represent the state's interest by serving as a quality assurance entity throughout the design and construction of the project.

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I am convinced that the Alabama Prison Transformation Initiative will address longstanding, critical issues in the state's prison system. It is not a cure-all, but it is a huge, and historical step towards comprehensive prison reform.

Jefferson S. Dunn  
Commissioner, Alabama Department of Corrections