

Fwd: Mississippi scrambles to find cells for 625 violent inmates after Parchman prison unit deemed unsafe - CNN

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To:

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Mississippi scrambles to find cells for 625 violent inmates after Parchman prison unit deemed unsafe

(CNN) — A Mississippi penitentiary unit housing violent inmates "has a failing infrastructure," and while officials have moved hundreds of prisoners to a nearby private prison, 625 still need cells, [the state Department of Correction says](#).

The move comes more than seven months after a state health inspector visited Mississippi State Penitentiary at Parchman and, [in a 154-page report](#), graphically documented crumbling, unsanitary conditions in which prisoners lacked power and water and it "rains inside" the cells of one unit. Following a series of clashes in the prison that left at least four prisoners dead — and later spurred rappers Jay-Z and Yo Gotti to assist prisoners in suing the state — the department last week said it had arranged for private prison firm CoreCivic Inc. [to move 375 prisoners to Tallahatchie County Correctional Facility](#) in Tutwiler, about 8 miles north of Parchman.



Numerous toilets were leaking or inoperable in the prison, the health inspector said.

"The facility is already operational and sufficiently staffed to manage close custody inmates," state corrections said Commissioner Pelicia Hall in a statement. "The department acted swiftly because of the violence at MSP and a lack of manpower to restore and maintain order. We also cannot staff any other facility."

The department has not responded to CNN's email seeking comment and additional information.

Problems have been reported throughout Parchman, where roughly 3,600 of Mississippi's 19,000 inmates are incarcerated, but Unit 29, which can house 1,500 inmates, has the most issues, Hall has said for months.

"This facility, originally constructed in 1980 and renovated in 1996, has become unsafe for staff and inmates due to age and general deterioration," she wrote in an August budget letter.

This isn't the first time Hall has asked for help with the state's prisons. In August 2018, she requested [the FBI help investigate the deaths of 15 inmates](#) in the span of a month.

Report: Litany of problems at Parchman

In June, state Department of Health environmental administrator Rayford Horton issued a lengthy report, including scores of photos, outlining the conditions at Parchman. While it didn't focus solely on Unit 29, it documented several serious issues within the unit.

The unit's kitchen, for instance, had a missing soap dispenser, stopped-up garbage disposal, milk and food with no expiration dates, a fly trap "covered with flies," a ceiling leaking above a dishwasher and food that needed to be removed from a moldy, 75-degree cooler.





The inspector cited problems with showers, including leaks, missing knobs and this rusty drain.

Unit 26's kitchen was singled out because supervisors were not wearing gloves while handling food, its toilet was leaking, there was no hand soap and Horton "observed a fly in the water being prepared to cook" and had to advise a prisoner to dump it out. In Unit 32, which houses the laundry area and another kitchen, Horton wrote that it was "raining in (the) freezer."

Numerous other issues were reported throughout the prison, though judging from the report, the inspector found Unit 29 especially problematic. Among the most commonly cited issues:

- No power
- No lights
- No hot water
- No cold water
- No water at all
- Inoperable toilets, sinks and showers
- Toilet leaks
- "Rains inside cell"
- No mattress
- No pillow
- Mold
- Dayroom lights out
- Bird nests in windows
- Holes in cell wall
- Exposed wires

Problems with lights, power and water were evident in about 100 cells each, according to the report, while almost 100 inmates had no or damaged mattresses and about 200 prisoners had no pillows.





Birds' nests were observed in the windows of several prisoners' cells.

In one zone of a Unit 29 structure, Horton reported, "No power in building."

Correction officials were "cleaning" following "recent acts of vandalism," the department said, and after the recent violence, some gang members were placed in the maximum-security Unit 32, which is structurally sound, to separate them from their rivals and prevent further incidents.

Outgoing commissioner has asked for more money

In her fiscal 2021 budget request, Hall asked for \$22.5 million to repair Unit 29, as well as \$35.6 million to fill 800 vacant positions at three state prisons.

"The number of officers has continued to dwindle as the agency's pay has not kept pace with industry salaries and other professions," a DOC news release said, adding that officials would like to raise correctional officers' pay from \$25,650 to \$30,370, which would bring Mississippi in line with its four neighboring states.



In one cell, water fell through a hole in the ceiling onto inmates' beds, the inspector found.

Even with a 3% pay increase in July, Hall said, salaries of Mississippi correction officers are the lowest in the country.

Hall has resigned from her post and is slated to step down this week, but she said she would continue advocating for the department.

Mississippi's regional, state and private prisons were put on lockdown earlier this month as investigators sought answers on a rash of disturbances — some of them gang-related — that killed one prisoner at South Mississippi Correctional Institution in Leakesville, one at Chickasaw County Regional Correctional Facility in Houston and two at Parchman, officials said.

A fifth death at Parchman was not related to the disturbances, officials said.

Two inmates escaped Parchman during the melees but were apprehended days later.



The inspector also found a "molded potato cassarole left inside a kitchen oven."

[In a January 9 letter to Hall and Gov. Phil Bryant](#), Team Roc — the philanthropic arm of Jay-Z's Roc Nation empire — accused the state of an "utter disregard for the people it has incarcerated" and threatened to "pursue all potential avenues to obtain relief" should state leaders maintain the status quo.

"These inhumane conditions are unconstitutional," it said. "The Eighth Amendment of the United States Constitution prohibits the infliction of cruel and unusual punishment and is violated when prison officials fail to protect against prison-related violence and when prison conditions fail to meet basic human needs."

CNN's Tina Burnside contributed to this report.

Sent from my iPhone