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Minnesota Department of Corrections Plans Prison Closures to Address Budget Crisis

Agency announced plans to close correctional facilities in Togo and Willow River

ST. PAUL, Minn. – The Minnesota Department of Corrections today notified its staff and legislative leaders of plans to close the state’s correctional facilities in Togo and Willow River to address a substantial budget crisis. The closure of the state’s two smallest prisons comes after the legislature adjourned from the recent special session without action on the agency’s supplemental budget request. The Department of Corrections faces a budget deficiency of approximately \$14 million in the fiscal year ending June 30, 2021. While these two sites operate the Challenge Incarceration Program (CIP), the program will continue to operate in full at other existing facilities.

In addition to these facility closures, the DOC will implement additional reductions in commissioner’s office personnel and central administrative services, and renegotiate purchase of service contracts to achieve a balanced FY21 budget and help stabilize the agency for the next biennium. Corrections officials are projecting that the agency’s budget deficiency will be approximately \$25 million in the next biennium. The total DOC budget in the current fiscal year is approximately \$611 million.

While the state’s next biennial budget will not be set until next year, the agency is readying for the economic challenges caused by the COVID-19 global pandemic.

“We take these steps out of a commitment to deliver critically needed services that offer opportunity for transformation and a safer Minnesota,” said DOC Commissioner Paul Schnell. “While the actions we announced today are immensely difficult, Minnesotans rightly expect that we be responsible stewards of public resources as we fulfill the agency’s mission,” Schnell added.

MCF-Togo has approximately 48 FTEs and MCF-Willow River has approximately 51 FTEs. While most of those positions will be eliminated, some will need to be retained to support continued operation of CIP at other existing minimum custody prison sites. The combined annual budget for Togo and Willow River is approximately \$11 million.

Following today’s announcement, the agency will begin work with staff, labor partners, and other stakeholders to develop a comprehensive timeline and plan to implement the changes.

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