DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

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St. Paul, MN:

Legislative Leaders along with Governor Walz have agreed to a phased closure of MCF-Stillwater to consolidate the state's prison facilities to enhance the DOC's economic efficiency, to end state investments into the crumbling infrastructure at MCF-Stillwater, and to minimize the ongoing health and safety concerns the facility presents to both staff and the incarcerated population.

For years, lawmakers have discussed and heard testimony from community advocates, formerly incarcerated people, and DOC staff, including union leaders, on the hazardous conditions at MCF-Stillwater. Ensuring the health and safety of staff and incarcerated individuals and practicing good stewardship of taxpayer dollars are primary factors in the decision.

MCF-Stillwater was built 1914 and is the second oldest facility in Minnesota. Despite the dedicated efforts of staff, the prison is long past its useful life. The deferred maintenance needs at the facility are currently estimated at $180 million and fully modernizing or replacing the facility on site has an estimated cost of $1.3 billion. This legislative decision enables the decommissioning of an outdated institution and supports the state's goal of maintaining a modern, safe, and cost-effective correctional infrastructure while aligning fiscal resources with budgetary priorities.

The closure of Stillwater is expected to occur over the next four years, with full decommissioning anticipated in FY2029. Over time, this phased closure will result in annual state savings of more than $40 million.

The decision reflects recognition of the unsustainable condition of the Stillwater facility. Consolidating the state's prison system makes sound economic sense. Each correctional facility requires a wide range of operational resources. Reducing Minnesota's correctional facility footprint decreases the need to replicate the purchase and replacement of the facility security systems and basic operational equipment, such as commercial food service equipment, office furniture, and maintenance equipment like tools, lawn mowers, and snow removal machinery.

"This is a moment of real change for our agency," said Paul Schnell, Commissioner of the Department of Corrections. "We fully recognize the impact this decision will have on both the lives and careers of the Stillwater staff and on the incarcerated people for whom Stillwater has been home for years or even decades. We will be open and honest with staff and the incarcerated population throughout the implementation," he added.

A Two-Phase Closure Plan

To implement and manage planned closure, the Minnesota Department of Corrections (DOC) is planning a two-phase approach to first reduce operations at MCF-Stillwater, followed by step-down to full closure of the site. This strategy will maintain critical service options at the Stillwater facility while still achieving significant cost savings and maintaining safety throughout the system.

Phase 1: Reduced Operations

Upon passage of the public safety omnibus bill, DOC leadership will initiate steps to begin a reduction of the population and operational footprint at MCF-Stillwater over several months. Approximately half of the incarcerated population will be transferred to one of the DOC's other nine male facilities, with several living units remaining at Stillwater during this period.

Staffing will be reduced proportionally. The DOC will explore various mechanisms to transfer staff to other positions, but a reduction in staffing is expected. The DOC will work closely with labor unions to ensure that the staff impact is as minimal as possible.

During Phase 1, the DOC will launch two critical studies:

1. A **management study** to guide operations, staff logistics, and community considerations. The study will assess and provide recommendations for the operational processes involved in permanently vacating MCF-Stillwater. Key areas of focus will include labor management, logistics for transferring incarcerated individuals, community impacts, and an analysis of the states future need for prison bed space.
2. A **decommissioning study** to plan the long-term future of the Stillwater site. This study will explore options for decommissioning the facility's physical infrastructure and examine future opportunities for the site's buildings and land.

Phase 2: Full Closure

Beginning July 2027, the DOC will start the final transition to fully vacate the MCF-Stillwater site, transferring the remaining incarcerated individuals and staff, with a complete closure expected by **June 30, 2029**.

Once legislative approval is secured and the Governor signs the public safety omnibus bill into law, the DOC will begin implementing the phased closure plan. Updates will be shared with staff, the state's incarcerated population, and the public throughout the transition. This process represents an important step toward building a state correctional system that is safer, more sustainable, and produces more effective outcomes for all Minnesotans.

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