



FLORIDA CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS CATHOLIC DAYS AT THE CAPITOL

IMPROVING PRISON INFRASTRUCTURE AND CONDITIONS

Key Message:

Please support the appropriation of resources necessary to improve failing prison infrastructure and meet staffing needs.

TALKING POINTS:

- The legislature has recognized that the state's prison system is underfunded and understaffed, while the number of offenders to be incarcerated is projected to rise over the coming years.
- Staff turnover remains very high: 58% of officers have been on the job less than 2 years.
- The physical condition of many facilities is very bad: electrical infrastructure and plumbing, windows, roofing, flooring and more are in urgent need of repair. Around 75% of housing units lack air conditioning.
- Not enough funding on the front end leads to large and unexpected costs on the back end. The state has had to deploy the National Guard to staff prisons and to divert funds for excessive overtime pay in order to meet staffing requirements and costly emergency repairs.

BACKGROUND:

Florida has one of the largest prison systems in the US. The Department of Corrections is responsible for 87,000 imprisoned offenders across 134 facilities. During the Covid epidemic the number of incarcerated persons dropped but has since risen and is projected to continue to rise in coming years and decades. The age and condition of these facilities varies (the oldest was constructed in 1913), and after years of concerns, the state commissioned a comprehensive investigation and recommendations from the global consultancy firm KPMG, which was delivered at the end of 2023. This report uncovered a crisis situation, with 11% of facilities in critical and 26% in poor condition and with dangerous levels of officer vacancies. The report found expected capital needs of \$6.7B over the next twenty years, with \$2.2B of that total needed for immediate critical repairs.¹

Florida has taken some important steps: beginning in 2024, the legislature directed an additional \$100M per year to correctional facilities' maintenance and repair. The governor's proposed budget fully funds all positions, which will enable the prisons to decrease vacancies (and therefore make prisons safer). However, funding for capital needs does not yet come close to what is needed to maintain safe and humane prisons.

The Catholic Church—reflecting on the divinely revealed truth that every human being is made in God's image and likeness, and impelled by the example of the Son of God who emptied himself and even descended into hell out of love for undeserving sinners—calls for the humane treatment of prisoners, even of those guilty of heinous crimes.

¹ KPMG, *Final Multi-Year Master Plan [FAR-D16]: Charting a Path to a Safer, More Efficient Correctional System*, prepared for the State of Florida, Department of Management Services, December 27, 2023.

POTENTIAL OBJECTIONS AND RESPONSES:

OBJECTION 1: Why should taxpayer dollars go toward making guilty criminals comfortable? Shouldn't the needs of law-abiding citizens come first?

RESPONSE 1: There is no question that the state is fulfilling its duties to justice in punishing and confining those who have gravely harmed others. Not only do we have a moral duty to maintain certain basic standards of humane treatment, our prosperous state is capable of meeting this need while still funding excellent schools and other public goods. In fact, it is even in the interest of fiscal responsibility to plan prudently for foreseeable maintenance needs rather than have to pay sudden costs to meet a crisis. Additionally, safer prisons contribute to the well-being and rehabilitation of inmates, as well as better working conditions for staff, yielding long-term benefits for our state.

OBJECTION 2: The state is already spending an extra \$100 million per year on the capital needs of the prisons. Why do we need to spend even more?

RESPONSE 2: The governor and legislature are to be commended on the positive steps they have taken. According to the state's own commissioned report, \$2 billion is the amount needed just for *immediate* capital needs. \$100 million is only 5% of that figure, which does not cover future capital needs for the projected prison population increase in the coming years.

STATUS:

Funding for the department of corrections is determined in the annual budget. The governor first proposes a budget (this has already occurred), and then prior to the end of the legislative session the House and Senate will agree upon a final budget to be approved by the governor. We encourage legislators to build upon the governor's proposals by increasing the amount appropriated for the Department of Correction's Correctional Facilities Maintenance and Repair budget.

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March 14, 2025