



FLORIDA CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS CATHOLIC DAYS AT THE CAPITOL

IMPROVING PRISON INFRASTRUCTURE AND CONDITIONS

Key Message:

Support: Florida's Prison System's Strategic Reform

Please support the appropriation of resources necessary to reform our prison system, improve failing infrastructure, retain staff, and create a path toward a more efficient correctional system that ensures public safety.

ADDITIONAL TALKING POINTS:

- Approximately 30% of our facilities need immediate repairs for issues such as leaking roofs, corroded doors, broken windows, and crumbling stucco. To maintain security, safety, and integrity while managing inmate capacity, immediate modernization of outdated infrastructures is needed.
- With the goals of increasing capacity, maintaining employee and inmate safety, reducing costs, deploying resources more efficiently, increasing flexibility and innovation, retaining staff, and mitigating risks, the State retained KPMG to create a 20-year master plan to identify, quantify, and prioritize DOC's staffing and capital improvement need.
- As the current management of our prison system is unsustainable, KPMG presented the State with three options, all of which focus primarily on increasing capacity in Florida's prison system.
- Reform objectives include the construction of three prisons and two hospitals over 20 years, closing four maintenance-intensive facility prisons within the next 20 years, reopening 8,294 beds across 16 prisons in the upcoming four years, building 4,640 new dorm beds at existing sites across 18 prisons by 2030.

BACKGROUND:

Although the inmate population has increased and has more complex needs, Florida has had to reduce the number of prison beds in use due to persistent staff vacancies. An innovative, effective system is needed to enhance staff safety and job satisfaction to mitigate persistent staff vacancy, turnover, and continuous staff shortages while mitigating the risk of potential lawsuits. Further, as the population of Florida increases, our inmate population is growing. The state anticipates that the inmate population will exceed that capacity by next year and increase by 18%-32% in less than 20 years. Additionally, almost 29% of current prisoners are older than 50 with chronic health issues, and the state is failing to meet the increased demand for healthcare services, projecting a deficit of 420 hospital beds by 2030. As such, DOC has to rely on more expensive, short-term infirmary or community hospital beds that create higher security risks. Similarly, the state lacks resources to address the needs of over 600 prisoners with dementia, brain injuries, or other complex care issues who require specialized housing as part of their outpatient care.

POTENTIAL OBJECTIONS AND RESPONSES:

OBJECTION 1: What is the Church's perspective regarding the government's responsibility to not only incarcerate but rehabilitate, restore, and reintegrate inmates into their communities?

RESPONSE 1: God's call for justice in tandem with mercy emphasizes the inherent dignity of both victims and their perpetrators. As such, the Church encourages policymakers to direct public resources toward not only modernizing existing, and building new prisons, but also towards supporting programs of hope that challenge, encourage, and reward offenders for changing their behaviors and learning new skills. Prevention, education, substance abuse and mental health treatment, and community alternatives such as parole, probation, and reintegration will create safer communities.

OBJECTION 2: Instead of spending \$582 million on prison air conditioning, should that money be spent to increase salaries and benefits? Would that make a difference in retention?

RESPONSE 2: Despite increasing starting salaries for corrections officers by 31% (\$33,500 to \$45,760), the staff vacancy rate is approximately 26%, with turnover rates between 30%-76%. As staff retention strategies are dependent on issues beyond compensation, the state must consider working conditions. Less than 25% of Florida's corrections facilities have air conditioning. Temperatures inside buildings without air conditioning can soar 15 degrees higher than the temperature outside. Extreme heat and humidity increase agitation and the possibility of unruliness among inmates—creating a potentially dangerous environment for employees. Further, facilities without climate control hinder staffing objectives and retention rates. As a result, Florida's National Guard has been working inside prisons for over a year, with 300 still serving in these facilities.

STATUS:

The House's proposed budget provides only \$50 million in "non-reoccurring" funds. However, the Senate's proposed budget provides \$100 million "recurring" annually for 30 years, a total of \$3 billion, to address both long-term construction projects and the repair of our aging prison infrastructure. The first year of funding would provide funds to complete the Lake Mental Health facility and funding for four new dorms at existing prisons.

***For additional information, please contact:
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