



News for Immediate Release

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Corrections to Save \$23 Million by Replacing Two Older Prisons

Harrisburg – Department of Corrections Secretary John Wetzel today announced that the agency will replace two older state prisons by opening the newly-constructed State Correctional Institution at Benner Township – a move that will save taxpayers \$23 million in fiscal year 2013-14 and more in future years.

Tentatively, the plan is to shortly begin closing the State Correctional Institution at Cresson, Cambria County, and State Correctional Institution at Greensburg, Westmoreland County, and to complete the process by June 30.

“We have always been committed to replacing old capacity with new capacity,” Wetzel said. “Under Governor Tom Corbett’s leadership, we are committed to obtaining a greater public safety return on our investment,” Wetzel said.

“By streamlining processes in our corrections system, adopting stricter performance standards and realizing initial impacts of policies unanimously adopted by the General Assembly, our population gradually has stabilized and we even have experienced our first significant decrease in our inmate population in more than 40 years.”

Wetzel said staff and inmates at SCIs Cresson and Greensburg will be transferred throughout the prison system.

“In anticipation of these closings, I implemented a hiring freeze within the department in order to be able to provide affected employees an opportunity for employment elsewhere within the state prison system,” Wetzel said.

As a result of the hiring freeze, there are approximately 700 vacancies throughout the prison system, not including the 564 employees anticipated to operate SCI Benner Township.

Many of the inmates will transfer to SCI Benner Township, Centre County, as well as to a new, 300-bed housing unit at SCI Pine Grove, Indiana County, that has yet to be opened.

“We do not expect a need to reopen either of these prisons,” Wetzel said. “We are beginning to see a continued decrease in the inmate population because of internal improvements and recently implemented prison reform legislation. In fact, since June 2012, we have seen a decrease in our inmate population by 500 inmates.

This decrease, coupled with the fact that newly-constructed, 2,000-bed SCI Benner Township is ready to open, allows us the opportunity to move forward with plans to close these prisons.”

Wetzel said that older prisons are less efficient and more costly to operate.

“They are costly to physically maintain and require more resources,” he said. “The new prison at SCI Benner Township is less costly to operate, requires fewer resources to operate and provides a more secure design for the safety of the staff and inmate population.”

SCI Cresson, which was originally built in 1913 as a tuberculosis sanatorium and later served as a state hospital before being turned into a prison, costs \$62 million per year to operate, houses approximately 1,400 inmates and employs 500 individuals. It costs an average of \$103 per day to house inmates at this prison.

SCI Greensburg, which opened in 1969 as a regional correctional facility, costs \$46 million per year to operate, houses fewer than 1,000 inmates and employs 370 individuals. It costs an average of \$110 per day to house inmates at this prison.

SCI Benner Township has the capacity to house more than 2,000 offenders and requires 564 individuals to operate. The annual operating cost for SCI Benner Township is expected to be in the low \$60 million range per year depending on the number of employee transfers to SCI Benner Township.

“This is a replacement – two older, less efficient facilities are being replaced with a new, state-of-the-art facility that, in the long run, will save taxpayers \$35 million per year,” Wetzel said.

“Our corrections system is changing and improving as we continue to be fiscally responsible in the way we operate,” Wetzel said. “It doesn’t make sense to continue to operate old, less efficient facilities when a new one is ready to do the same job for less money.”

“We realize that this can be a difficult situation for our employees,” Wetzel said. “That is why I have directed our human resources offices to work with employees to help them through this process. Informational meetings and presentations will be held to inform the employees of the options available to them, but our goal is to ensure that every employee is offered a job in the system.”

The Department of Corrections will work with appropriate parties to surplus or sell the facilities after closure.

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