

## Warm Springs facility to hold some inmates

The Standard State Bureau - 9/23/05

HELENA — The state Department of Corrections has reached a tentative deal to house several dozen probation violators at a mothballed building on the State Hospital campus in Warm Springs to ease prison overcrowding, officials said Thursday.

The agency agreed in principle this week to an 80-cell "revocation center" at the hospital that would be run by Community Counseling and Corrections Services Inc., a nonprofit Butte corrections contracting company, Corrections Director Bill Slaughter said.

Details have yet to be worked out, but Slaughter said the center could be up and running by December and will employ 34 people. Renovation costs have been estimated at about \$300,000.

The facility would house offenders who violated probation and would otherwise likely be sent back to the Montana State Prison to serve the remainder of their sentences. About half of prison admissions are triggered by such violations, Slaughter said.

He and other corrections officials hoped the new option will help them avoid sending prison inmates out of state to relieve overcrowding.

"We'll use the center to determine if their community placement can be salvaged," Slaughter said. "It's consistent with our plan and strategy not to put people back into the deep end of the pool."

The facility will be run as a pilot project for three years. If the idea works, officials will consider building a permanent facility, Slaughter said.

The state has been looking for ways to ease prison overcrowding for months. The state's prisons and county jails are full, and officials have said little, if any, relief is expected. A decision on shipping inmates out of state is expected by Oct. 15, although available prison beds are in short supply nationwide in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, which displaced tens of thousands of inmates along the Gulf Coast.

Montana last sent inmates to out-of-state prisons in the mid-1990s due to overcrowding. Since then, the private Crossroads Correctional Center in Shelby was built, along with regional jails in Great Falls, Missoula and Glendive.

The 80-bed revocation center will look and feel like a prison, but only house offenders for about 30 days. Inmates will be required to undergo treatment and other programs, with the hope the short time behind bars will keep them out of prison again.

"We think it's an innovative approach that we hope can serve as a model for other states if successful," said Mike Thatcher, administrator of Community Counseling and Corrections Services.

The building to be renovated for the revocation center was built in 1972 to house court-ordered State Hospital commitments, officials said. It was closed for that purpose in the 1980s, but later housed inmates from the overcrowded Montana State Prison. It was most

recently used as the Butte-Silver Bow jail for about five years until the jail relocated a year ago.