

Shelby prison offers to expand with Department of Corrections seeking 120 new beds

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HELENA (AP) — Three private Montana prison operators and three local governments say they are interested in providing up to 120 new prison beds for the state Department of Corrections.

Corrections Department spokesman Bob Anez said state lawmakers approved about \$3 million to develop 120 beds starting next year.

"We need this to handle the expected growth within the system," he said. "The idea is to make sure you have enough space to handle not only the number of inmates, but also the kind of inmates you have."

The three private-prison operators interested in supplying the room for additional prisoners are Corrections Corp. of America; Community, Counseling and Corrections Services Inc.; and the Two Rivers Authority.

The state in September asked to be told by prison facility operators if they would be interested in supplying prison space for up to 120 new medium-security beds. That would include at least 20 beds for special needs inmates, who are older, disabled, mentally ill or those who require sex-offender treatment.

Corrections Corp. of America runs a private prison at Shelby that holds 560 inmates and said it could expand to hold another 120 inmates. The company said it could work with the state "to ensure the most cost-effective and well-suited design," and that it was willing to explore an "even larger expansion to meet the department's needs."

Anez said the Corrections Department will use the responses to create its formal bid request.

Two Rivers Authority has a vacant 464-bed prison in Hardin.

"Two Rivers Authority is highly motivated to bring its facility into operation," wrote Bill Joseph, chairman of the authority.

Mike Thatcher, chief executive officer for Community, Counseling and Corrections Services, said a "Montana-based, not-for-profit corporation with 28 years of correctional experience makes sense."

Butte-Silver Bow said it may have beds available, as did Broadwater and Gallatin counties.

The three government agencies each sent letters noting their jails may have space. At the Gallatin County Detention Center, Program Director Jackie K. Lemon said the county's 160-bed facility is only half full.