

## State spends \$42.1M for overtime

By Mary Sell Montgomery Bureau Jul 2, 2017

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### Overtime paid to state employees

2009: \$31.3 million

2014: \$41.4 million

2016: \$42.1 million

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### 2016 overtime

Agencies with the most OT in 2016, compared to 2014

Corrections: \$26.6 million, \$24.8 million

ALEA: \$6.2 million, \$5.6 million

Transportation: \$3.6 million, \$4.1 million

Mental Health: \$2.6 million; \$2.5 million

Source: Alabama Personnel Department

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MONTGOMERY – The Alabama Department of Corrections spent \$26.6 million on overtime in fiscal 2016, and the short-staffed agency is on track to spend more this year.

Corrections made up the lion's share of the \$42.1 million in overtime for state employees last year, a number that's ticked upward in recent years.

"Alabama prisons are significantly understaffed with correctional officers, which results in a high rate of overtime to manage, at a minimum, three shifts for 24/7 operations," DOC spokesman Bob Horton said last week.

The correctional officer staffing at the state's maximum- and medium-security facilities is at 42.8 percent and 59 percent at the minimum-security facilities, Horton said.

Three months remain in the 2017 fiscal year and, so far, corrections has spent \$22.2 million on overtime.

Too little staff and too many prisoners have led to two years of debate in the Legislature on building new prisons. Proposals to borrow about \$800 million have failed.

"Modern correctional facilities with better security and surveillance technologies would require fewer officers, which would allow the department to increase the staffing to 95 to 100 percent using the

current workforce,” Horton said.

In May, there were 29,619 merit system state employees statewide, State Personnel Director Jackie Graham said. There were 28,288 in 2014 and 31,418 in 2009.

“Some agencies will pay overtime rather than hire additional employees,” Graham said. “For some agencies that is more cost effective.”

Depending on the agency, overtime can be cheaper than salaries and benefits for new employees. But some do have true staff shortages.

“(Overtime) is not practical for some agencies. They absolutely do need that employee,” Graham said.

At the Alabama Law Enforcement Agency, overtime is paid largely through grants or reimbursements from other agencies, and is related to specific events, spokeswoman Robyn Bryan said.

Additional troopers on the road for the Fourth of July holiday will be paid through Alabama Department of Transportation and Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs.

Though ALEA officials for years have said more troopers are needed, that shortage doesn’t contribute to its overtime needs.

“In fact, because of ALEA’s staffing shortage, overtime assignments that troopers have typically covered are now shared with local law enforcement agencies,” Bryan said.

The Alabama Department of Mental Health saw a large drop in overtime between 2009 and 2014, but a slight increase since then. A comment from a department representative about the increase wasn’t available last week. It’s closed several hospitals in recent years, including North Alabama Regional Hospital in Decatur.

### **Accrued leave down**

One number that has decreased in recent years is the amount of accrued annual and sick leave state employees are carrying.

In 2012, the TimesDaily reported state employees were owed a total of \$449 million in accrued hours carried over from year to year.

That number is now about \$269 million, according to the state Department of Finance.

Vacation time — up to 480 hours — may be cashed in at an employee’s hourly wage upon leaving the job, whether because of retirement, employment elsewhere, or because of a layoff or termination.

Employees can bank up to 1,200 hours of sick time. When they retire, they can cash up to 600 of those hours, or apply all 1,200 to early retirement.

Since 2012, almost 5,000 state employees have retired, according the Retirement Systems of Alabama.

State Finance Director Clinton Carter said last week the leave is a manageable expense for agencies, though it can be expensive for smaller departments when multiple, long-serving employees depart.

There is sometimes an issue with where the leave cost is accrued and where it is born, Carter said. For example, if a Finance Department employee with 25 years experience and hundreds of banked leave hours transfers to the Alabama Department of Corrections and retires a year later, the DOC pays the entire tab for the leave.

Carter has advocated for a leave bank, where departments pay in for each of their employees and the funds follow a worker from agency to agency.

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