

Alabama prisons increase staffing as part of mental health case

By The Associated Press

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MONTGOMERY — Alabama prison officials told a federal judge they are increasing staffing as part of a court case over mental health treatment but said they can't do anything permanent without more money.

The state has increased recruiting efforts and is enlarging the size of its training classes for correctional officers, according to a document filed by the Department of Corrections in federal court Monday. The agency said it began a process more than two months ago to almost double mental health staffing in prisons.

But making improvements in the system will require about \$10 million annually that Corrections doesn't have, the agency said, and it says it's up to the governor and the Legislature to provide the money.

The department said it reserved the right to withdraw the plan if money isn't made available to fund it.

A federal judge earlier this year declared mental health treatment in Alabama prisons to be "horrendously inadequate."

Dozens of inmates sued the prison system in 2014, accusing the state of failing to provide basic medical and mental health care. About 3,300 inmates in state prisons have been identified as having a mental health condition.

After ruling against the state in June, U.S. District Judge Myron Thompson ordered the two sides to attempt mediation on a proposed remedy through the summer. If a joint agreement cannot be reached, the court will consider suggestions from both sides in the fall.

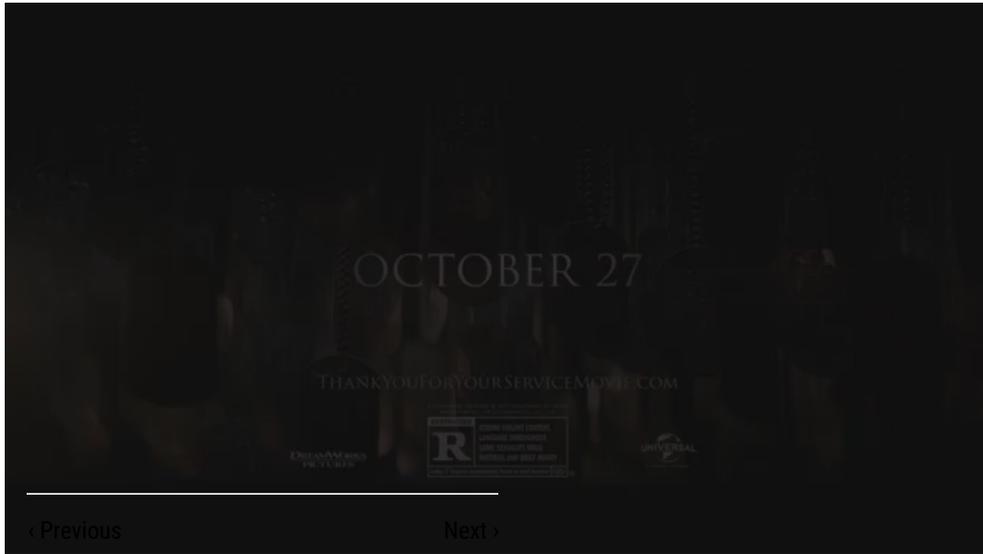
The state said consultants had visited staffing requirements in three prisons and would evaluate 11 remaining prisons if approved by the court.



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