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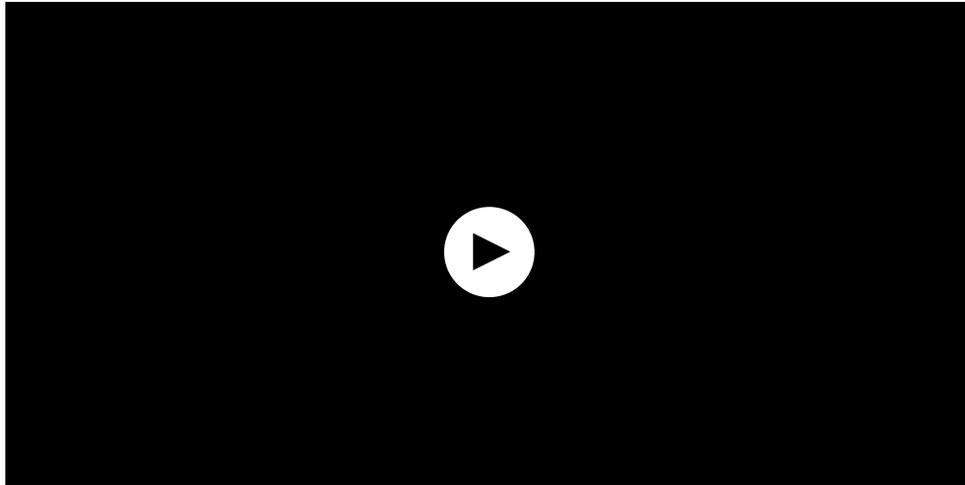
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Searcy Hospital in Mount Vernon Could Reopen

BY JASMINE WILLIAMS
WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 17TH 2016



When the hospital in Mount Vernon closed in 2012, an estimated 390 people their jobs and patients were forced to find relocate to smaller residential facilities. (WPMI)

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MOBILE, Ala. (WPMI) During a town hall meeting in Spanish Fort Tuesday, Jim Perdue, Alabama's Mental Health Commissioner met with elected officials and other mental health leaders where he talked about his proposal to reopen Searcy Hospital.

When the hospital in Mount Vernon closed in 2012, an estimated 390 people their jobs and patients were forced to find relocate to smaller corrections officials said the closure not only devastated the town of Mount Vernon, but also led to overcrowding in Alabama prisons and jails. Mobile Metro Jail Warden Trey Oliver said that about 10% of the jail population in Mobile depend on psychotropic medications to survive. He said since 2012, the number of mentally ill inmates continue to rise.

"An individual who suffers mental illness, the last place you want them is in a county jail," he said.

Perdue told Oliver and other officials that he wanted to repurpose Searcy Hospital to serve terminally ill and mentally ill prisoners and inmates. He wants to use the newer buildings and help improve mental health in the state while saving tax payers money. The reopening of the hospital would also mean new jobs in the area and could help reduce prison overcrowding. While the hospital would only serve inmates, Oliver said Perdue has a five-point plan to improve mental health in Alabama and he thinks it's a step in the right direction.

"There's no one silver bullet that will fix all this, but with his five part plan, I think majority of these needs will be addressed," Oliver said, "down the line, I think this will be a great thing."

AltaPointe's CEO Tuerk Schlessinger also agrees with the plans to improve.

"The commissioner understands the financial situation of the state, but it has not stopped him from wanting to move forward and make strides in things the can improve upon and make efficient and improve what always doing without legislation to help us financial is a fantastic thing," Schlessinger said.

Along with plans to repurpose Searcy Hospital, Perdue talked about his plans to move Alabama's Department of Mental Health, from Montgomery to Tuscaloosa in an effort to save money and expand bed space. He wants to improve and increase patient care at Bryce Hospital, Mary Starke Harper Psychiatrics Center, and Taylor Hardin Medical facility in Tuscaloosa. Perdue also emphasized a need expand services for children with autism.

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