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Editorial: The governor's prison bill vs. common sense

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By WSFA 12 News Staff [CONNECT](#)

MONTGOMERY, AL (WSFA) - I touched about prisons and Gov. Robert Bentley's pending prison bill [some weeks back](#).

I stated then and continue to believe that the 30-year bond valued at \$1.5 billion with fluctuating interest rates to pay for the new prisons is not the wisest of investments.

There is no coincidence that when the state opted to shut down 99 percent of its mental health facilities there was a major increase in our prison population. Alabama closed residential mental health facilities, and so did other states.

A report by the Stanford University Law School states: "Treatment of the mentally ill in the United States is in a state of crisis. The mentally ill in this country are far more likely to be treated in jail or prison than in any healthcare facility. Presently, the United States incarcerates an estimated 350,000 prisoners who suffer from serious mental illness, almost 10 times the number of persons housed in the nation's psychiatric hospitals."

Many of the prisoners with mental health needs are nonviolent offenders who only need quality treatment and medications to help them and might not be in prison if they were getting the care they needed.

I think those in the Legislature should evaluate the cost of the \$1.5 billion versus helping those suffering from mental illness who have landed in prison because they no longer receive the treatment they so desperately need. If these individuals were properly treated, the prison population would decrease, we would have more productive people in our community, and ultimately, we might save some taxpayer money.

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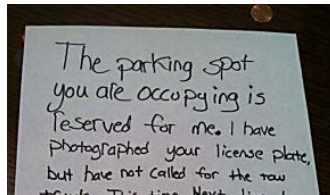
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