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# SPLC calls for AL prisons to triple mental health staff, double corrections staff

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By Michael Doudna, Reporter [CONNECT](#)

MONTGOMERY, AL (WSFA) - The Southern Poverty Law Center responded with a brief to the Alabama Department of Corrections' proposal to address the staffing problems in the state prison system.

Staffing is the first issue set to be addressed as the DOC attempts to address a mental health system deemed "grossly inadequate" by federal Judge Myron Thompson earlier this year.

Thompson said both mental health and correctional officer staffing were overarching issues which contributed to the inadequate mental health care.

Earlier in October the DOC submitted a proposal to the court that proposed hiring around 125 mental health care workers, almost doubling the current mental health staffing levels.

"We have to provide medical care, we have to provide mental health care, we have to provide some degree of protection for people who are in our prisons" Maria Morris, senior supervising attorney for the SPLC, said.

The SPLC then responded in a brief which called for the state to triple the mental health care staffing while doubling the current correctional worker staffing.

"You only have a mental health counselor to do rounds if you've got someone to take him. You've only got mental health groups if there is someone to provide security and that's going to be a challenge," Morris said.

The estimated cost of such a hiring move would be estimated to exceed well over \$100 million annually.

"So yeah, it's going to be expensive and we've avoided those costs for a really long time. But now we need to start paying them," Morris said.

Alabama may not have the money to afford such a funding increase without looking at new revenue measures. Lawmakers typically do not raise taxes during election years. However, if the court rules the state must hire more people, not having the funds will not be considered an excuse.

Raycom reached out to the DOC for comment but received no response.

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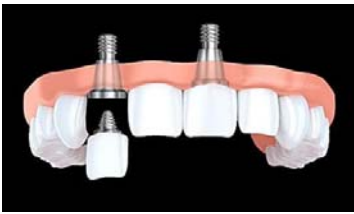
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