



EXHIBIT 8
DATE Jan. 31, 2005
HB 2; Dept. of
Corrections

THE DAWSON COUNTY ADULT DETENTION / CORRECTIONS FACILITY

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Major Jeffrey A. Walters, Facility Administrator

January 31, 2005

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

For the record...

Please accept this written testimony from Major Jeff Walters, Facility Administrator of the Dawson County Regional Prison, regarding the expansion of secure custody beds in Montana.

At the request of the Committee, the Montana Department of Corrections and its contracted facilities has explored a number of potential options for the expansion of secure beds within the corrections system. I believe that everyone has accurately recognized that the upward growth trend in the number of incarcerated adults in Montana will continue in this fiscal biennium. However, I strongly feel that we must also look beyond this biennium and begin planning for long-range growth as well.

When the Dawson County Regional Facility was originally constructed, plans were included for the future addition of forty-eight (48) more beds. All of the infrastructure, electronics, etc. is in place to add an additional housing unit at an estimated cost of one-half that of new construction. However, this type of expansion project will require extensive fiscal and operational planning. It is simply not realistic to believe that we would be prepared to offer new beds in time to impact the immediate growth needs of the system. We are, however, very interested in expanding our services to meet the long-range needs of the system. Based on discussion with other administrators, I believe the other regional facilities are in a similar position.

I have reviewed and discussed at great length all of the options presented to you today, and I strongly feel that the only realistic short-range solution to population growth is the expansion of services at Crossroads Correctional Center in Shelby. The already maximized infrastructure at Montana State Prison makes the projected costs of expansion on that compound exorbitant. Given the infrastructure needs, the necessary time to design, plan and carry out construction of an additional unit at MSP would also make this an ineffective option.

There has also been some discussion before this committee of dormitory style housing of offenders at Montana State Prison. In considering this option, one must be realistic about the definition of population growth. The projected growth is not guaranteed to be limited to non-violent, low-security offenders. The safety and security of institutions are

dependent on the effective, appropriate classification and housing of offenders. Offenders requiring administrative segregation and close custody security are a fast growing demographic population in our system. The number of inmates identified as gang members and organized security threat groups continue to grow. Inappropriately housing offenders in low security units simply to save costs risks the safety and security of the entire institution. While there are obviously circumstances in which the open, dormitory-style approach is appropriate, growing demographics in the Montana corrections population certainly indicate that this is not an appropriate solution to our short-range needs.

It is apparent to me that we, as a system, will not "out-build" population growth in Montana. Managing the upward trends will require a comprehensive strategy of revised sentencing, expanded secure care beds, and expanded post-custody services and release programs. We must develop both short and long-term vision for the future of corrections in Montana. I believe that all of the state, private and contracted facilities will have a necessary role in the long-term management of population growth.

The most appropriate, cost-effective, and achievable solution to our short-term needs is the expansion of services at Crossroads Correctional Center, and I strongly encourage this Committee to approve this option.

Thank you for your consideration.