

MARCH 4, 2009

## DIRECTOR'S NEWS UPDATE



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### No Budgeted Furloughs

The possibility of employee furloughs has been mentioned in the media on a few occasions since the recession and subsequent revenue decline has started to have a measurable impact on Oklahoma. Employees have inquired on whether or not the Department of Corrections is considering or will have to utilize employee furloughs. Currently we are operating from a budget that will not have to consider furloughs as a mechanism to compensate for budget deficiencies. I realize that the department has utilized furloughs in the past while other state agencies did not and once when all state agencies did. The latter was in the early 1980's during what was referred to as the oil bust. Our goal in the department is to always build a budget that does not include relying on payroll savings to cover anticipated deficits in other operational areas. Now there are always caveats to that. Another national tragic event like the terrorist act that destroyed the World Trade Center Towers could create an economic downturn resulting in a budget deficit that we could not overcome without affecting payroll. Also, the recession may worsen in fiscal year 2010 and a greater than expected revenue shortfall may cause all agency budgets to be reduced after budgets had previously been approved. The

commitment is to avoid furloughs and currently they are not even being considered as a possibility. Our fiscal year 2010 budget that has been presented to the Governor and legislative leadership is built on the premise that furloughs will not be used to balance deficits.

Most correctional agencies in the country have to currently balance budgets through facility closures, offender early release programs, layoffs and furloughs, but the real savings that many states are looking at involve sentencing reform. Currently there is no sentencing reform legislation active during this session. However, at some point within the next two years, Oklahoma will have to enact sentencing reforms as the options to generate additional revenues to fund the overall second highest incarceration rate in the nation will be exhausted.

Lastly, legislation in House Bill 1608 has caused some staff to express concerns that this would have correctional officers return to a 28 day cycle. This is not a department supported bill and an analysis of it indicated it would have no impact on our current work cycle. The department moved away from the 28 day cycle and has no intention of returning to it for correctional officers.