

NEWSRELEASE

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Prison Medical Staff Honored

DEER LODGE – Lt. Gov. John Bohlinger on Monday praised the work of the medical staff at Montana State Prison for what he called their “countless hours of dedication” in complying with requirements to improve medical, dental and mental health services at the prison.

He noted that the achievement has led to dismissal of a major portion of a federal lawsuit filed against the state in the aftermath of the 1991 riot at the prison.

The 18 mandates contained in the 1994 settlement agreement between the state and American Civil Liberties Union covered everything from the number of doctors and nurses needed to staff the prison infirmary to how quickly patients had to be seen by staff.

Court-appointed monitors made 10 visits to the prison and filed a dozen reports chronicling the prison’s progress in complying with the standards.

“In their final report to the court, the monitors applauded the accomplishments of the prison and the medical staff,” Bohlinger said in a visit to the prison infirmary.

He said, “The report concluded that ‘the program we reviewed is dramatically different than the program we saw when we first became involved in this litigation. Staff are working very hard to ensure that patients are seen both timely and appropriately. For this they are to be commended.’”

Following submission of that report, the state and the ACLU agreed that further court monitoring of the medical provisions of the agreement was no longer needed.

“This is an example of government at its best, responding to the needs of the people it serves and doing so in a fashion that should be a source of pride for Montana State Prison employees and the taxpayers of Montana,” Bohlinger said, in presenting a plaque commemorating the event.

Department of Corrections Director Bill Slaughter said the dedication and diligence of the medical staff avoided what could have been a more costly and lengthy court battle over the claims against the prison.

“The work of the staff here demonstrates what people working together for the common good can accomplish,” he said. “Everyone – inmates, employees and taxpayers – have benefited.”

Warden Mike Mahoney said, “I believe this is a landmark event in the history of corrections in Montana, and I could not be more proud of our staff.”

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