

NEWSRELEASE

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Corrections Department Delays Special-needs Project

HELENA – The Montana Department of Corrections, citing a lack of funding, has postponed its plans to develop a program to serve “special-needs” inmates.

The concept, authorized by the 2005 Legislature, envisioned a facility capable of providing individualized care and treatment for inmates with mental disorders, physical disabilities, chronic medical problems and behavioral problems. The department had contemplated issuing a request for proposals for up to 256-bed program.

However, driven by a growth in the offender population that has exceeded available funding, the agency faces an \$11.5 million shortage in this budget year, and Director Bill Slaughter said Thursday that the financial situation demands the special-needs project be postponed.

“We don’t have the money to pursue this project so we cannot in good conscience proceed with it,” he said. “We delayed this decision as long as we could, but once the fiscal predicament became clear, we had to change course. It was a difficult decision to put on hold something we believe would be a valuable addition to the Montana corrections system and meaningful benefit to offenders.”

Slaughter said the idea of a program to address the unique needs of certain inmates remains worthwhile, and the department may ask the 2007 Legislature to consider providing money that would allow development of a special-needs facility.

The department has proceeded with the legislatively mandated meth treatment project, which will serve another large segment of Montana’s special-needs inmates. One or more contracts are expected to be awarded later this month. Three Montana private, nonprofit companies proposed treatment facilities in Billings, Boulder and Lewistown. The program will provide treatment to 120 men and women convicted a second or subsequent time of possessing methamphetamine.

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