

News Release

Governor Tours Elkhorn Treatment Center – Discusses Montana Leading the Country in Lowering Incarceration Rates

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(HELENA) – Governor Brian Schweitzer along with Department of Corrections Director Mike Ferriter toured the Elkhorn Treatment Center in Boulder today.

“Talking to people at this facility who are about to graduate the program and get their lives back on track is truly inspiring,” said Governor Schweitzer. “Public safety is the number one priority and community corrections facilities are working. Our programs hold people accountable, but also help them deal with addiction problems, mental illness or whatever is at the root of their criminal behavior.”

Late last week, Montana received some very positive news. A study by The Pew Charitable Trusts showed Montana leading all 50 states in reducing prison populations. Nationally, the number of incarcerated citizens grew by 1.6 percent in 2007, while Montana’s inmate population dropped 3.9 percent during that time.

Montana had the sixth highest growth rate in the number of people incarcerated in the nation in both 2003 and 2004. According to the U.S. Justice Department’s Bureau of Justice Statistics, the average annual growth in Montana’s prison population in 2001, 2002, 2003 and 2004 was 5.5 percent. That was nearly three times the national average during that period (1.9 percent).

A recent University of Montana study showed that among the offender population in Montana, 46 percent have a mental illness and a staggering 93 percent have a substance abuse problem or a chemical dependency. The goal of many of the new programs is to provide the kind of individualized treatment that will work at reducing the number of repeat offenders. In 2006 3,572 Montanans were behind bars. At the beginning of 2008 that number had gone down to 3,431.

Elkhorn Treatment Center

Elkhorn Treatment Center opened in April 2007. It houses 40 female offenders with meth addictions. They spend nine months in intensive treatment at the center, followed by six months of aftercare in prerelease centers. The women have two or more meth possession convictions or a history of chronic substance abuse. Many have both mental health and addiction problems. Twenty women have graduated so far. Two more are scheduled to graduate on Thursday, March 6.

Facts on development of community-based programs:

- In the past three fiscal years, we have added 172 prerelease beds
- 120 meth treatment beds were added in 2007
- 40-bed DUI treatment center opened in Glendive in 2005
- 155-bed Passages facility opened for women in Billings, featuring a prerelease center, chemical dependency treatment program, and an assessment and sanction center.
- Department of Corrections has contracted with chemical dependency counselors since 2006 to work with offenders through the state's largest probation and parole offices.

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