



MISSISSIPPI
DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS
OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS



PRESS RELEASE

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"OPERATION CELLBLOCK"
COMMISSIONER EPPS SHUTS DOWN ILLEGAL INMATE
CELL PHONE USAGE

Parchman –Vowing to immobilize state inmate use of contraband cell phones, Mississippi Department of Corrections (MDOC) Commissioner Chris Epps today introduced *Operation Cellblock*, the agency's strategy through new technology to intercept illegal cellular phone transmissions by inmates at the Mississippi State Penitentiary (MSP).

MDOC, in cooperation with technology solutions partners, Global Tel*Link (GTL) and Tecore Networks, has entered into an arrangement to obstruct illegal cell phone usage by inmates at the Mississippi State Penitentiary. The Tecore Intelligent Network Access Controller (iNAC) Managed Access System is a revolutionary technology that forms a radio frequency umbrella that intercepts cell phone transmissions in a defined area, permits authorized and 911 calls, and prevents unauthorized inmate communications. GTL is providing the iNAC Managed Access system for MDOC at no cost through its contract obligations with the agency for inmate telephone service.

"Our objective is to shut down this criminal activity that is taking place inside our prisons," Commissioner Epps stated.

Now, instead of a hearing a familiar voice on the other end of the line, Parchman inmates communicating with illegal cell phones are going to hear a voice recording that states, "*the cellular device you are using at the Mississippi State Penitentiary has been identified as contraband and is illegal to possess under the criminal statute, 47-5-193. The device will no longer function.*"

The business of smuggling cell phones into the state's prisons is profitable. Visitors and correctional staff have been paid \$300 - \$500 by the inmates to covertly bring in the contraband cell phones. The Mississippi Department of Corrections, like corrections agencies across the country, confiscates thousands of illegal cell phones annually that have been smuggled into the prisons. For the first half of 2010, MDOC figures show 1,994 illegal cell phones and 1, 412 cell phone accessories were seized by agency officials at the state's prison facilities. Agency reports also reveal twenty-six (26) civilian arrests and forty-six (46) MDOC staff arrests were made during 2007 through June, 2010 for persons furnishing or attempting to furnish inmates with illegal cell phones. MDOC referred the civilians for prosecution; agency employees were referred for prosecution and terminated.

Though prison officials are faced with epidemic contraband cell phone problems, methods to curb the ability of the inmates who use the cell phones for drug deals, witness intimidation, escapes and a wide range of criminal activity, have not been conclusive. It is illegal under current federal law to jam cell phones.

"State law prohibits the use or possession of cell phones by inmates, and punishes those guilty of providing the contraband to inmates with up to fifteen years in prison (§47-5-195)," Commissioner Epps said. "We are going beyond just confiscating these illegal devices. We are now going to impede their ability to operate this menace, which is threatening the safety of our prisons and communities."

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National corrections agency officials, law enforcement, and state and federal leaders were on hand to experience the new technology at Parchman, which is the first commercial deployment of its type in the United States and marks a definitive turning point in the ongoing struggle to prevent illicit use of cell phones in American correctional facilities.

Rear Admiral (Ret.) James Arden Barnett, Jr., Chief of the Federal Communications Commission's Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau, said, "The FCC believes that technology can provide the answer to defeating contraband cell phone use in prisons, and we are proud to have assisted with rapidly clearing regulatory hurdles to support Mississippi's plan. Mississippi's creative and foresighted efforts demonstrate the state's leadership in protecting its citizens and solving this serious problem. This program has national significance. The use of managed access technology is an effective way to stop the use of contraband cell phones in prisons. It is one of the technologies that can be used right now and it does not interfere with vital police and firefighter communications or interrupt 9-1-1 emergency calls from being answered. The FCC looks forward to working with state and local jurisdictions that may choose to deploy similar technologies in their correctional facilities."

Operation of the new technology will be forthcoming at the Central Mississippi Correctional Facility in Rankin County and the South Mississippi Correctional Institute in Leakesville.

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MEDIA NOTE: POWERPOINT PRESENTATION IS AVAILABLE VIA THE MDOC HOMEPAGE AT
<http://www.mdoc.state.ms.us/>
OPERATION CELLBLOCK