

CONCLUSION: PEER evaluated the Mississippi Department of Corrections's (MDOC) budgeting process and identified corrections inmate cost management and fiscal planning best practices. MDOC's lack of foundational models, documentation, transparency, and continuity of knowledge represent a failure to adhere to best practices. Adherence to fiscal planning best practices and use of an updated inmate population growth model would improve the Department's ability to develop and implement its annual budget.



BACKGROUND

The PEER Committee, under its authority granted by MISS. CODE ANN. § 5-3-51 (1972) et seq., authorized a review of best practices in inmate cost management and fiscal planning. This review is based on legislators' concerns regarding budgeting in the Mississippi Department of Corrections (MDOC).

PEER limited its review of MDOC's inmate management and fiscal planning to the overall policies, SOPs, and processes. PEER did not audit financial reports or financial information or perform any statistical review of MDOC's actual implementation of cost-per-day or population growth models on a facility level.

MDOC's budget request cycle reveals a consistent use of additional appropriations requests. PEER compiled the previous six years of budget request information to clarify trends within MDOC's broad budgetary practices as related to the Department's inmate cost management and fiscal planning processes, all of which contribute to the reliance on additional appropriations.

MDOC's largest additional appropriation request occurred in FY 2023, totaling \$28,336,356 all related to medical services contracts.



KEY FINDINGS

- **From FY 2018 to FY 2023, MDOC requested an additional appropriation in all years except for FY 2022, with an average additional appropriation request of \$15,389,360.**
From FYs 2018 to 2023, MDOC's average requested budget was \$379,060,017, with 2019 having the lowest request at \$355,426,382 and 2021 having the highest at \$419,110,853. In all years examined, the Legislature issued MDOC a legislative appropriation less than the agency's requested amount, with an average difference of \$28,125,393.17, representing a 7% difference between the average requested amount and the average legislative appropriation.
- **In all years examined except FY 2022, MDOC requested an additional appropriation to address contractual services in one, some, or all of the following categories: medical services contracts, private prison contracts, regional facility contracts, and local facility contracts.**
In no year did the original appropriations and additional appropriations total an amount equal to MDOC's original request.
- **MDOC's actual expenditures fall well below the total appropriated amount, with the largest difference of \$6,682,568.**
In 2018, MDOC had a remaining fund balance of \$6,682,568. This was the largest remaining fund balance of all years examined. The lowest remaining fund balance was in FY 2019, with a remaining balance of \$3,150,770.
- **Out of the State General Fund, the Legislature provided MDOC a total of \$405,228,240 for support and maintenance. Out of the special funds, MDOC was provided a total of \$28,516,738 for defraying expenses.**
Of the total amount in general funding (\$405,728,240) provided by the Legislature to MDOC, approximately 60% (\$243,160,080) was utilized for support and maintenance to operate its state, county/regional, and private correctional facilities. Of the total amount in special funding (\$28,516,738), \$5,532,593 was utilized for defraying the expenses for only three of MDOC's facilities (i.e., South, Central, and Parchman).
- **MDOC's fiscal planning process lacks transparency, foundational models, and inter-departmental continuity.**
This contributes to a lack of clarity within MDOC's budgetary decisions and fiscal planning and MDOC's reliance on additional appropriation requests.

Corrections Inmate Cost Management Best Practices

PEER gathered applicable best practices from various professional organizations.

1. Ensure efficacy and effectiveness of programs.
2. Ensure consistent program implementation.
3. Focus programs on reducing recidivism where possible.
4. Ensure proper management and examination of all policies and procedures.
5. Ensure good fiscal control at all levels.

Fiscal Planning Best Practices

PEER gathered fiscal planning best practices.

1. Ensure that the financial process is transparent, auditable, and repeatable.
2. Institutionalize good financial management policies.
3. Have a clear, detailed mission for all financial planning.
4. Focus on long-term strategic planning.
5. Maintain detailed budget practice documents.
6. Maintain a consistent process of internal assessment.

MDOC Policies and Standard Operating Procedures

Of the 392 policies adopted by MDOC, 158 or 43.30%, have an effective date prior to August 2013. 113 of the 240 standard operating practices (SOPs) MDOC adopted, 47.08%, have an effective date prior to August 2013. MDOC's lack of updates to its policies and SOPs represents a failure to perform annual examinations recommended in best practices. It is also recommended that the Department make all policies available online in order to increase transparency and consistent operations.

According to correspondence with MDOC staff, the Department is currently undergoing a project to update and ensure the efficacy of all policies and SOPs.

MDOC Inmate Management Processes

In accordance with MDOC's SOPs for admission of offenders remanded to custody, the admission process is designed to maintain an efficient and effective method to receive offenders. Inmates transferred from other institutions within the correctional system receive an orientation to the new institution. Except in unusual circumstances, orientation for inmates transferred from another institution within the system is completed within seven calendar days after admission. In accordance with MDOC's policies for inmate transfers, the aim is to maximize resources by effectively managing the transfer of inmates between prisons safely, humanely, and securely, while minimizing risk to inmates, staff, and the general public.



RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Because MDOC's fiscal planning processes lack transparency and documentation, the Department should create documentation related to the details of the fiscal planning process.
 - a. Produce detailed internal processes guides that will aid employees in ensuring fiscal planning processes are completed in an auditable, transparent manner.
2. Both because the current population model is no longer applicable and because the ten-year time period is at an end, MDOC should develop a new population growth model and monthly review report process into the process in order to ensure continued applicability.
 - a. MDOC should also consider basing the review and application of this model off of the Arkansas Department of Correction's proven model and review process.
3. MDOC should continue its plan to review all current policies and SOPs.
4. In order to increase transparency and accountability within the standards of best practices, MDOC should continue its plan to post all unrestricted policies online on the Department's website once they are updated and confirmed.