

Why Wyoming sent 240 inmates to a Mississippi prison

by Maggie Mullen, WyoFile.com, via WNE

The Wyoming Department of Corrections’ transfer of 240 inmates to a private Mississippi prison due to a staffing shortage is a temporary fix to an ongoing problem, WDOC Director Dan Shannon says.

“We don’t have an inmate housing issue,” Shannon told WyoFile. “We have a staffing problem.”

Roughly 25% of the department’s uniformed staff positions are vacant, with most of those occurring at the Wyoming State Penitentiary in Rawlins and the Wyoming Women’s Center in Lusk. To account for that, the department has also transferred 40 inmates to the Lincoln County Detention Center and eight others to the Sublette County Detention Center.

The out-of-state transfers took place on Nov. 29 and Nov. 30. Those inmates are now housed in the Tallahatchie Correctional Institute in Mississippi, a private facility run by CoreCivic. In 2018, the department sent 88 inmates to the same facility, which spurred Wyoming lawmakers to take action on criminal justice reform before \$23 million was cut from the department’s budget in 2020.

“I want these folks back as soon as possible,” said Shannon, who’s anticipating that a Dec. 1 pay boost will attract more workers. Retention isn’t the issue, he added, pointing to this year’s rate of 90%.

“That being said, we’re receiving no applications,” Shannon continued. Between January and September, for example, the department accepted just 17 applications total for jobs at the Women’s Center and the State Penitentiary.

Those two facilities currently have a combined 81 officer vacancies.

This issue, according to one lawmaker on the Joint Judiciary Committee, comes down to pay. Starting pay for a correctional officer is \$25.26 an hour, according to the state’s job posting.

“I want to be clear — this is the state Legislature’s fault,” Rep. Karlee Provenza (D-Laramie) said. “It’s unfortunate that we haven’t valued our public employees in this state and paid them what they’re worth. So that’s exactly why we have vacancies.”

In February, lawmakers will meet in Cheyenne to work out a budget, and part of that conversation will involve employee pay. Additionally, lawmakers will need to replace federal relief dollars that were used as revenue replacement during the last two-year budget cycle for certain state agencies including the Department of Corrections.

The costs

Funds made available from staff vacancies helped make last week’s pay boost possible. Working within the confines of the department’s budget, Shannon said the state’s human resources department was able to approve the increase for correctional officers without going to the Legislature for funds. Those wages are now competitive with county jails near WDOC facilities, Shannon added. But it will be up to the Legislature to decide to maintain those rates.

The vacancies have also created difficulties for current staff. Over the past year, corrections staff have worked “exorbitant hours,”

costing the state upwards of \$400,000 in overtime pay some months when the department had to shuffle employees between facilities to cover mandatory posts, Shannon said.

When Shannon began looking for transfer opportunities, he first contacted facilities closer to Wyoming, like Montana, Colorado, California, Texas and Arizona. None of those places worked out, Shannon said, since they were only interested in female inmates or wanted a larger inmate transfer in order to make the arrangement profitable. Ultimately, Mississippi won out and will cost the state less per inmate on a daily basis than the rate to keep them in Wyoming. But that’s not the only cost to consider, Shannon said.

“Keeping them away from home with no home visits and limited family interaction — they do have access to video conferences and things like that — it does have a negative impact on the rehabilitative mindset,” Shannon said.

Provenza said the lower daily cost is not necessarily a good sign.

“Private prisons cut every corner they can to make every penny they can off of our money,” Provenza said. “By doing so, they make folks more likely to reoffend when they come back home in our neighborhood. They have no skin in the game whatsoever other than their bottom line.”

While transferring inmates to a county jail may be closer to home, Provenza said, those facilities lack the same services provided by the state’s prisons, like educational programming and more visitation options.

Without ample access to communication

with friends and family, Provenza said, “I don’t understand how someone is supposed to continue to have a meaningful relationship with people in their community, so that when they get out they have a place to land on their feet.”

What to do

“I prefer we really drill down on criminal justice reform,” Sen. Cale Case (R-Lander). “I think we have too many people locked up, too many things that are crimes.”

But Case and Provenza — who sit on the Joint Judiciary Committee together — both say the Legislature has little appetite for that approach.

For Judiciary Chairman Rep. Art Washut (R-Casper), it’s a matter of both pay and establishing modern workplace incentives within state government.

“This generation of employees that’s out there right now, they’re looking for work-life balance. They’re looking for opportunities to go out and enjoy life. They don’t want to just work every day,” Washut said. “And we’re gonna have to attend that as a state government.”

Every other state is facing the same challenge as Wyoming, Washut added, so if the Legislature isn’t “willing to pay those people the market rate, we’re going to have these kinds of [vacancies]. It’s a pay-me-now or pay-me-later kind of dilemma.”

Starting Tuesday, state agencies like the Department of Corrections will present their proposed budget to the Joint Appropriations Committee in Cheyenne. WyoFile is an independent nonprofit news organization focused on Wyoming people, places and policy.

Public notices

STATE OF) OFFICE OF THE
WYOMING) BOARD OF
OF) COUNTY
COUNTY OF) COMMISSIONERS
HOT SPRINGS) November 21, 2023

The Hot Springs Board of County Commissioners met in regular session on Tuesday, November 21, 2023, at 3:00 p.m. in the Public Meeting Room at the Government Annex. Present were Commissioners Tom Ryan, Phillip Scheel, and Paul Galovich. Also present were County Attorney Jill Logan, County Clerk Becky Kersten, and Administrative Assistant to the Commissioners Connie Guntly. Chairman Ryan led those present in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Approval of Agenda – The Commissioners adopted the agenda with the following change:

ADD: Other Business #6 Approval of Facility Use Application, Annex Meeting Room.

Approval of the Minutes – The Commissioners approved the minutes from November 7, 2023 meeting.

Approval of Special AP Warrant – The Commissioners approved Special AP Warrants for a total of \$11,225.75; consisting of a payment to Onsolve LLC in the amount of \$7,379.61 and Motorola Solutions Inc, in the amount of \$3,846.14 (see description below).

Amended Plat of Wyoming Lasting Legacy Subdivision – The preliminary plat Amendment to Wyoming Lasting Legacy Subdivision (File 2023-06) dividing Tract 14 into three lots was presented to the Commissioners. The property is located in the northeast quarter of the southeast quarter, Section 5, Township 43 N. Range 94W. Located west of E. Sunnyside Lane and north of Legacy Lane, it is bordered on the west by Owl Creek, and on the north by the Big Horn River. Chairman Ryan opened the Public Hearing at 3:05 p.m. after three calls for public comment and hearing none, Chairman Ryan closed the Public Hearing 3:07 p.m. Planner Bowman went over the subdivision and stated no Absolute or Relative Policy checklists are needed at this time due it being non-residential and no land use change is requested at this time. The Commissioners approved the preliminary plat amendment to Wyoming Lasting Legacy Subdivision with the following two conditions:

1) This approved preliminary plat shall expire one year after its date of approval. The final plat for this subdivision shall be submitted for the County’s review and approval prior to that expiration date.

2) A notion shall be placed on the final plat for the division of Tract 14, stating no residential structures shall be erected on these three lots. However, they could be used to accommodate replacement septic system drain-fields for the existing residences on Tracts 1, 7, and 15, as long as all required setbacks from water bodies and property boundaries are met.

Planner Bowman stated BLM sent him two unsigned copies of the Right of Way Permit for the Kirby Gravel Pit. The Commissioners approved Chairman’s signature on the BLM Right of Way Permit for Kirby Pit #2.

Request for Approval of Final Plat for Wyoming Whiskey Minor Subdivision – The Final Plat for Wyoming Whiskey Minor Subdivision was presented to the Commissioners, however the applicants had not signed the plat and were not available to sign at the time of this meeting. Planner Bowman inquired as to whether the Chairman can sign before the applicant for this final plat at the request of the applicant. Chairman Ryan stated procedurally the Commissioners are the final signatory, and would like to sign after the applicants sign.

Follow-up Discussion of ADA Compliance Intake Bathroom – Project Manager Les Culliton discussed the intake bathroom at the detention center. Mr. Culliton stated County Attorney Logan sent an email with her findings and recommendation. Mr.

Culliton suggested the Commissioners move forward with the ADA compliance work. The Commissioners approved Chairman’s signature on the Engineering Design Associates proposal in the amount of \$6,200, for ADA compliance in the Intake Bathroom.

Other Business – 1) Approval of Facility Use Form, Annex Meeting Room, Predatory Animal Control Board – The Commissioners approved Chairman’s signature on the Facility Use Form for the Predatory Animal Control Board meeting on December 11, 2023 at 5:00 p.m. 2) Approval of Facility Use Form, Annex Meeting Room, Assessor’s Office – The Commissioners approved Chairman’s signature on the Facility Use Form for the Wyoming Assessor’s Association Summer meeting on July 10th and July 11th 2024. 3) Vote for Local Government Liability Pool Nominees – The Commissioners voted for Rick Grant for the Commissioners position, Michael Bailey for Municipal Elected Official, and Hale Redding for the Special District Representative on the LGLP Board. 4) Approval of RFR #1 with WYDOT for Fly-In Event in the Amount of \$1,985.77 – The Commissioners approved RFR #1 for the Fly-In event. 5) Introduction of New Planner – Chairman Ryan stated Les Culliton is the new Planner for Hot Springs County. 6) Approval of Facility Use Form, Annex Meeting Room, State-Wide Shooting Complex Meeting – The Commissioners approved Facility Use Form for the H.S.C. Shooting Complex Committee meeting on November 27, 2023 at 5:30 p.m. Commissioner Galovich went over the time line for the state wide shooting complex proposals. Commissioner Galovich also stated the proposal will come before the Commissioners before it is submitted.

Chairman Ryan added he went to the Wyoming Water Development meeting for the Hot Springs County Rural Water Joint Powers Board project. The budget was approved for the project and will be presented to legislator in January.

Correspondence – 1) **Natural Resource Planning Meeting Minutes** – September 2023; 2) **Owl Creek Water District Agenda and Minutes** – October 2023; 3) **Invite to Annual Christmas Tree Festival** – Commissioners asked Stephanie Conrad to submit a wreath for the festival on the County’s behalf.

The Commissioners reviewed the forgoing correspondence. No further action was required.

Adjourn – The meeting was adjourned at 3:32 p.m.

A regular meeting of the Hot Springs County Board of Commissioners will be held on December 19, 2023 at 3:00 p.m., at the Hot Springs County Annex building, 117 N. 4th St. Thermopolis. The public is invited to attend in person or stream online. To be placed on the Agenda please email Connie Guntly, Administrative Assistant to the Board of County Commissioners at connie.guntly@hscounty.com. Per Wyoming Statute section 18-3-516 (f), County information can be obtained at the County website <https://hscounty.com/> or by requesting a Public Records form from the County Clerk’s office.

Attest

Thomas J. Ryan, Chairman	Becky Kersten, County Clerk
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Special AP Warrants		
Vendor	Description	Amount
Onsolve LLC	Code Red Service	\$7,379.61
	Warrant Total:	\$7,379.61
Motorola Solutions	All Band HP Mobile Radio R&B truck	\$3,846.14
	Warrant Total:	\$3,846.14
Total All Warrants: \$11,225.75		
Pub. Dec. 14, 2023		No. 1505

STATE OF) IN THE
WYOMING) DISTRICT COURT
) ss.

COUNTY OF) FIFTH JUDICIAL
HOT SPRINGS) DISTRICT

Civil Action Case No. CV23-52

IN RE NAME CHANGE)
)
OF)
)
Peyton James Winger)
)
Minor Child, By Next Friend,)
)
Cody Dyan Stewart.)

PUBLIC NOTICE BY PUBLICATION

In accordance with Wyoming Statutes 1-25-103, notice is hereby given that a *Petition for Name Change of Minor Child*, Civil Action No. CV23-52 has been filed in the Wyoming District Court for the 5th Judicial District, whose address is 415 Arapahoe St., Thermopolis, WY 82443, seeking to change the name of the minor child Peyton James Winger to Peyton James Stewart.

Unless an Answer or Response to the Petition referenced above is filed within 30 days following the last publication of this notice, an order may be entered granting the requested name change.

Dated: November 22, 2023

Terri Cornella
Clerk of District Court/Deputy

Pub. Nov. 30, Dec. 7, 14 and 21 No. 1496

STATE OF) IN THE
WYOMING) DISTRICT COURT
) ss.

COUNTY OF) FIFTH JUDICIAL
HOT SPRINGS) DISTRICT

Civil Action Case No. C2023-53

IN RE NAME CHANGE)
)
OF)
)
Reid Allen Winger)
)
Minor Child, By Next Friend,)
)
Cody Dyan Stewart.)

PUBLIC NOTICE BY PUBLICATION

In accordance with Wyoming Statues 1-25-103, notice is hereby given that a *Petition for Name Change of Minor Child*, Civil Action No. C2023-52 has been filed in the Wyoming District Court for the 5th Judicial District, whose address is 415 Arapahoe St., Thermopolis, WY 82443, seeking to change the name of the minor child Reid Allen Winger to Reid Allen Stewart.

Unless an Answer or Response to the Petition referenced above is filed within 30 days following the last publication of this notice, an order may be entered granting the requested name change.

Dated: November 22, 2023

Terri Cornella
Clerk of District Court/Deputy

Pub. Nov. 30, Dec. 7, 14 and 21 No. 1497

NOTICE OF FINAL PAYMENT

Pursuant to Section 16-6-116 of the Wyoming Statutes, latest revision, Notice is hereby given that Hot Springs County School District #1 has

been advised that the work on the Springview Street Utility Extension Project has been completed according to the plans and specifications and rules set forth in the Contract between HSCSD #1, the Owner, and Big Horn Redi Mix, the Contractor, and said Contractor is entitled to final settlement therefore. All persons, firms or corporations who have any claims for work done or equipment/materials furnished on said work are hereby notified that final payment will be made to said Contractor in accordance with the terms of the Contract after the 41st day (1-17-24) following the first publication of this Notice. This Notice does not relieve the Contractor and the sureties on their bond from any claims for work or labor done or materials or supplies furnished in the execution of the Contract.

/s/ HSCSD #1

Pub. Dec. 14, 21, & 28, 2023 No. 1504

STATE OF) IN THE
WYOMING) DISTRICT COURT
) ss.

COUNTY OF) FIFTH JUDICIAL
HOT SPRINGS) DISTRICT

Probate No. CV23-46

IN THE MATTER OF)
THE ESTATE)
)
OF)
)
GERALD WALTER WELCH)

Deceased.

NOTICE OF PROBATE - INTERSTATE

TO ALL PERSONS INTERESTED IN SAID ESTATE:

You are hereby notified that on the 31st day of October, 2023, the estate of the above-named decedent was admitted to probate by the above-named Court, and that Sam Welch and Jesse Welch were appointed Co-Administrators and Co-Personal Representatives thereof.

Notice is furtherer given that all persons indebted to the decedent or the estate are requested to make immediate payment to the undersigned at P.O. Box 1418, Cody, Wyoming 82414.

Creditors having claims against the decedent or the estate are required to file them in duplicate with the necessary vouchers, in the office of the Clerk of said Court, on or before three months after the first date of the first publication of this notice, and if such claims are not so filed, unless otherwise allowed or paid, they will be forever barred.

DATED this 25th day of September, 2023.

SAM WELCH,
Co-Administrator and
Co-Personal Representative

JESSE WELCH,
Co-Administrator and
Co-Personal Representative

Pub. Nov. 30, Dec. 7 & 14, 2023 No. 1495

ATTENTION:
HOT SPRINGS HEALTH BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING TIME CHANGE

The Hot Springs Health Board of Trustees will meet on December 19th, Beginning at 6:30 P.M. in the Hospital Conference Room.

Pub. Dec. 7 & 14, 2023 No. 1501