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**NEWS ADVISORY**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**March 17, 2017**

**Department of Corrections Director Anne L. Precythe announces Department’s new mission, condemns failed leadership of the past**

Governor Greitens appointed me to be the Director of the Missouri Department of Corrections in January. It’s become clear that a leadership void has led to a system where the good work of so many of our officers and employees is overshadowed by the failures and actions of the few.

This Department serves a critical mission in protecting our people and correcting criminal behavior. Governor Greitens and I are both committed to repairing this Department’s problems and providing the leadership that has been lacking.

The changes begin by being direct about our problems:

- We need to take care of the men and women working on the front lines. It’s easy to forget the critical work that our officers and all of our workers do for public safety. There have been widely publicized allegations of inappropriate workplace behavior by a small number of employees of this Department. Lawsuits alleging inappropriate workplace behavior have already cost the State millions of dollars. Let me be clear: the overwhelming majority of our employees would never engage in that type of behavior. Regardless of the merits of any individual allegations of wrongdoing, it is critical that we have no tolerance of any such behavior in the future. Employees on the front lines should never dread coming to work because of hateful, hurtful behavior from their coworkers. Any allegations

of improper behavior in the workplace will be swiftly investigated and appropriate sanctions will be administered to true wrongdoers.

- New leadership is badly needed in some specific facilities. In October of 2016, an offender committed suicide at the St. Louis Community Release Center. Loss of life in our facilities is always tragic and troubling. When this unfortunate death came to my attention, I was particularly concerned about the circumstances, and initiated an immediate review which will result in personnel sanctions being taken swiftly against responsible staff. We will also continue to assess whether additional changes in procedures or leadership are called for.
- We need to address the lack of morale in this Department. No organization can succeed when workers feel forgotten and unappreciated. Many corrections workers may feel as if no one has had their back in past years. Governor Greitens and I are committed to restoring morale in this Department, to achieve its important mission of serving public safety, and this begins today. Among other things, we are committed to sound hiring practices and fair pay that rewards good work.
- There are also some basic things that any good public safety operation should do. For example, the training academy for new correctional and probation and parole officers does not have any kind of recognition system at the end. No one from the Director's office congratulates or thanks new officers for agreeing to serve. We're going to change that. The officers who keep us safe should know that their leaders have their back and see their service.

This Department faces real challenges. But in my short time here, I also know that we have great potential. In the first few weeks of work, we're diving headfirst into solutions that can turn corrections around.

- We're making aggressive leadership changes to ensure that we have proven leaders at all levels of management, beginning at the top. We have a new Parole Board Chair, new leadership at the Kansas City Reentry Center, and more changes of leadership in the works, including new management at the St. Louis Community Release Center.
- We are reforming the way that we promote employees and implementing a Zero Tolerance policy for any manager who fails to respond quickly and correctly to allegations of sexual harassment or any other unacceptable behavior. We have created an Office of Professional Standards to ensure investigations and employee discipline cases are completed efficiently, fairly, and timely.
- I'm personally engaging with the men and women at the front lines of our Department. Too many of our employees have never met their leadership. I'll be attending staff training classes and conducting town hall meetings with employees all over the State. Today, we're also bringing together the senior level management from Adult Institutions, Probation and Parole, Offender

Rehabilitation, Human Services, and the Central Office. This type of all-hands meeting has, to our knowledge, never been done in this Department before. We'll have these meetings regularly, to make sure that every manager is on the same page about our Department's new direction.

- We're working to make sure that the Department of Corrections actually corrects criminal behavior. Our mission is simple: reduce crime and violence in Missouri by ensuring that if offenders are released, they do not victimize another family. I truly believe that if our Department can internalize that mission, from leadership on down, we can be better public servants.

Nothing I am saying detracts from the amazing work being done by an extraordinary number of outstanding employees. It's our intention to be honest about what's going on in our corrections system, and it would be dishonest to focus only on our shortcomings and not talk about our successes. The Department of Corrections has hundreds of employees participating in Peer Action Care Teams to help co-workers in times of extreme stress. We have successful programs that encourage inmates to spend their time productively: translating books into Braille for the blind, learning a vocation, or serving their communities. We have specialized units for inmates with mental or physical disabilities, and impressive telehealth and apprenticeship programs.

Going forward, our 11,000 employees should be defined by these extraordinary successes and achievements. I am proud to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with our fine officers and employees. I will always have their backs. Part of that means taking swift action to remove anyone who makes the Department and their co-workers look bad. Moving forward, any behavior that falls short of excellence will not be tolerated. Outstanding work and excellent behavior will be rewarded.

I look forward to updating all of you on our positive progress. We have a lot of work to do, and much of it long overdue. There are no quick fixes to these problems. We need your support and your encouragement over the long term to reform your Department of Corrections, and I look forward to working with you on that mission.

Yours in Service,

Anne L. Precythe

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