



Champions For Effective Local Government
OKLAHOMA MUNICIPAL LEAGUE, INC.
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NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Local Officials Offer Assistance to Department of Corrections

(May 17, 2016) Municipal, County and School Officials from Beaver to Broken Bow gathered at the Oklahoma Municipal League (OML) offices Monday to discuss the recent action taken by the Department of Corrections to close the 15 work release centers located around the state. Officials were not only concerned with the wide-ranging impact to their communities, but also the lack of notification prior to the action taking place and not being given an opportunity to express their concerns in an open and public forum. Walter’s City Manager John Sheppard said, “I’d like to know why the Department of Corrections (DOC) didn’t communicate their budget concerns with us? We may have been able to negotiate a better cost structure for the Department than Corrections Corporation of America (CCA). We could have been part of the solution.”

The Department of Corrections has entered into a five year contract with Corrections Corporation of America, a private prison company, for the lease of the Northfork Correctional Facility in Sayre, OK. According to this agreement, the DOC has agreed to have tax payers foot the bill to pay the California company \$37.5 million to lease the facility. “It’s better to keep tax dollars in the state rather than send \$37.5 million to an out of state corporation”, commented Beaver’s Mayor Kirk Fisher.

Initial estimates from a survey done by OML shows, with only a handful of cities and towns responding, an estimated loss of well over \$8.8 million to replace laborers, with the outstanding communities still in the process of compiling the information. According to Jeff Casida, Hobart City Manager, “calculating the overall cost and impact to a city is logistically difficult. Even though we are only 16 miles from the proposed new facility, there will still be adverse effects to our city.”

The 15 work release centers will be closed as of July 1, 2016 leaving cities and towns without the crucial assistance they need to serve their communities. These centers do not just benefit

the community in which they are located, but many municipalities that utilize the work centers throughout the area. From all appearances the Department of Corrections is looking to balance their budget on the backs of municipalities and local government.

The social benefits are far reaching and impact both the offenders and the communities in which they serve. Cities report workers, after completing sentences, being promoted to full time positions after receiving the job specific training that municipalities provide at the work centers. Additionally, several communities are actively looking for ways to enhance their programs by offering the ability to earn a GED as well as learn other job related skills. Tishomingo Mayor Tom Lokey commented, "We changed our ordinances so we could hire directly from the work centers; it's been that successful for us."

"These work release centers have continued to be the best utilization of tax payer dollars. After a long partnership, we had a reasonable expectation this would continue because no notice was given of the termination considerate of the timeliness of the budget preparation process. The severance should be carried out in such a manner as to not abruptly abandon municipalities committed and obligated to carry out grant programs. There is where the greater damage will be sustained." said Randy Clark, city manager of Grandfield. The state initially came to the cities to implement the work release center program; now they've pulled the plug without warning which adversely affects city budgets, city projects and loss of jobs. Cities have proven they are willing to be good partners with the DOC; it's unfortunate that the DOC doesn't see the value municipalities bring to the table.

Local officials ask the Department of Corrections to include them in future dialog. Open communication is critical to open government.

About Oklahoma Municipal League

The mission of the OML is to provide services and programs required by municipal officials to assist them in better serving their citizens, and to act as the representative of Oklahoma municipalities in interactions requiring a united voice. Since 1913, the League has served as the individual and collective voice of local officials on the state and national level.