



# Weekly Message

Deputy Secretary Ricky Dixon



## Prison Closure Discussions and the Facts A Message to Staff

*Ricky Dixon currently serves as the Deputy Secretary of Institutions. He began his career in 1996 as a correctional officer and worked in eleven prisons to include Lancaster, Lowell, Baker, New River, Lawtey, FSP, Martin, Indian River, Okeechobee, Desoto and Wakulla.*

It is very disappointing and concerning to hear it suggested that closing state prisons is the answer to our staffing crisis. Especially, when this suggestion is coming from those that may not have expertise in the corrections profession. Even though the State Senate changed their initial recommendation from closing four prisons to closing one, and even though this may be feasible, it is not acceptable or suitable when considering the associated risks to staff, inmate, and public safety. Let's break down the facts on how closing prisons would negatively impact safety within the facilities and how doing so would impact you personally, even if your facility was not selected as one of the prisons to be closed.

It is true that closing a prison may help neighboring facilities in terms of staffing levels. However, neighboring prisons would not have the available capacity to house all of the inmates from the prison(s) designated for closure. The remainder of these inmates would have to be distributed throughout the state. This means that those housing units we have closed at high vacancy rate prisons, for the purpose of lowering mandatory overtime requirements, would have to be reopened. Doing so would drive up mandatory overtime (negatively affecting work-life balance), increase unmanned critical post hours, as well as escalate the associated violence at those locations. In other words, for every location we help by closing a nearby prison, we compromise countless staff in dozens of other facilities by reopening dorms that were closed due to lack of staff. The simple fact remains staffing is our biggest issue.

These suggestions have been made with very little forethought to the inmate population growth that will most certainly occur in the months and years ahead, and with little consideration to time constraints associated with closing and subsequently reopening prisons. Closing a prison could very well devastate a small community. Reopening a prison following that economic impact on the surrounding community, may not be possible.

Finally, considering your dedication and all you have gone through to keep our prisons staffed – to ask you to drive excessive distances to maintain your employment with FDC or to relocate your family, is simply something we are not willing to do at this time. Others are, but we are not! Recent survey results reinforce our concern over the number of staff we would lose if we were to take this approach. Over 71% of you indicated you were not willing to commit to relocating should your prison be selected for closure.

Secretary Inch has clearly articulated solutions to our agency's staffing crisis and those solutions are expressed in the Governor's Budget Recommendation. Familiarized yourself with the Secretary's most recent message to staff where he clearly expressed our position regarding this topic ([http://dcweb/secretary\\_msg/2021/04-02-IO.pdf](http://dcweb/secretary_msg/2021/04-02-IO.pdf)). Closing entire prisons, overpopulating remaining prisons, exacerbating an already dangerous work environment, driving up mandatory overtime and expecting you to commute and/or uproot your families, is not the answer.

I encourage each of you to become active participants in this process. On your own time, please contact your elected representative(s) and/or your certified labor organization to let them know your thoughts:

State Representative (<https://www.myfloridahouse.gov/findyourrepresentative/>);

State Senator (<https://www.flsenate.gov/Senators/Find/>);

Certified Labor Organization (<https://www.flpba.org/contact/>).

Thank you for your support and continued dedication as we work toward real solutions that will ultimately result in much safer and appropriately staffed prisons.