

A plan to lift restrictions on the number of inmates counties can send the Department of Corrections has been jeopardized by a Senate proposal to cut portions of the department's security, repair and maintenance budget by \$4.5 million.

Both the Governor's Executive Budget and the House budget prioritized these critical needs. If Senate cuts go into effect, they may jeopardize the department's ability to safely spend the \$1.9 million the Senate wants devoted to lifting quotas by increasing processing capacity and opening more beds.

"While we still hope to lift the quotas, suddenly our focus must shift from the quota issue to managing the increased public safety risks and budget pressures created by these cuts," Corrections Director Jon Ozmint said.

These are funds that the department uses to ensure basic safety and security. This money pays for the department's maintenance, repairs, security equipment and vehicles, including our hundreds of vehicles used to transport inmates and our perimeter security vehicles. The prison system is dependant on these funds to repair and replace broken or worn our radios, locks, cameras, fences, windows, gates, doors, handcuffs, leg-irons, weapons and ammunition.

"From worn out locks, to broken radios and cameras, to staff and inmates traveling in unsafe and unreliable vehicles, these cuts to our highest priority requests and our most basic safety needs are a recipe for disaster," Ozmint said.

While the state House proposed spending \$4 million on deferred maintenance, the Senate proposed only \$1 million. The \$2 million allotted for vehicles and equipment in the House budget would be slashed to \$500,000 in the Senate's proposal.

"These cuts from the leanest correctional budget in the nation will ensure that we stay at the bottom of the nation in funding per inmate," Ozmint said.

In a budget that will grow government by over 10%, these cuts to security priorities result in an increase in funding of less than 2% for the only correctional system in the nation that is funded below 1999 funding levels. Since that time, budget cuts have forced the agency to cut its workforce from 7,000 employees to 5,600 while its inmate count has risen by over 3,000.

Funding for maintenance, repair and replacement of the agency's 29 prisons, security equipment and vehicles has been a concern for the past five years. Since the budget cuts of 1999-2002, the agency has been using left-over bond funds to meet these critical security needs. Representative Annette Young and House budget writers recognized that those funds are now depleted and included \$6,000,000 for these highest priorities: basic security needs. The senate cut that figure to a dangerously low, \$1.5 million.

