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Governor Daugaard Releases State Penitentiary After-Incident Report

PIERRE, S.D. – Gov. Dennis Daugaard today released an After-Incident Report on last month’s escape attempt at the South Dakota State Penitentiary that resulted in the death of corrections officer Ronald Johnson.

“The loss of Officer Johnson’s life was tragic,” the Governor said. “We continue to mourn the dedicated public servant while justice is being pursued for those who caused his death.”

Inmates Rodney Berget and Eric Robert were unsuccessful in the April 12 escape attempt. They were arrested within the prison confines and have been charged with first-degree murder.

As a standard operating procedure after the incident, the Department of Corrections (DOC) conducted a critical review of Penitentiary procedures. Gov. Daugaard directed that the review be incorporated into a more-detailed, public report on the incident. The initial review is included as an appendix to the after-incident report.

The report outlines policy and procedural modifications that have been adopted by the DOC since the incident, including:

- The addition of three correctional officers to staff posts while inmates are working in the prison industry shop areas
- Beginning the installation process of another 90-110 video cameras throughout the Penitentiary
- The purchase of additional body alarms for correctional staff
- Restrictions on foot traffic in certain areas of the Penitentiary grounds
- A review of inmate work assignments

“I have authorized hiring the additional staff, and I support the enhanced security equipment and procedures,” Gov. Daugaard said. “As I analyzed the events of April 12th and the actions of the DOC personnel in preventing the escape, I have become even more convinced about the quality of the people working in the prison system and the integrity of their policies and procedures. The Penitentiary is a sound, well-run institution that continues to strive for constant improvement.”

The Governor has directed DOC to request technical assistance in coming months from the National Institute of Corrections (NIC) for an independent evaluation of the department’s response to the incident and the state’s prison policies, procedures and training.

“The NIC review is an additional step we can make in this process to ensure the safety of the brave men and women who assume risk daily in order to protect society from those who would do us harm,” Gov. Daugaard said. “An outside review can be valuable in looking at our policies, procedures and facilities with a fresh set of eyes.”