



## Talks on reuse of mental health facilities as prisons in early stage, governor says

Published: Sunday, February 19, 2012, 10:46 AM Updated: Sunday, February 19, 2012, 11:00 AM

 By **al.com staff**

TUSCALOOSA, Alabama -- The conversation about converting soon-to-be shuttered mental health facilities in Tuscaloosa and Decatur into state prisons is in the very earliest stages, Gov. Robert Bentley said Friday.

"It's just something we're looking at," Bentley told **The Tuscaloosa News**, and state prisons Commissioner Kim Thomas said significant study would be needed.

Mental Health Commissioner Zelia Baugh**last week announced** that four of the six mental health centers in the state

will close by fall, as the state proceeds toward more community treatment options. On the closure list is the Taylor Hardin Secure Medical Facility in Tuscaloosa. Statewide, 948 workers are expected to lose jobs.

Only the Mary Starke Harper Geriatric Facility and the replacement for Bryce Hospital in Tuscaloosa will remain open.

Tuscaloosa Mayor Walt Maddox cited "uncertainty and confusion out of Montgomery" regarding the possible closure-prison conversion process.

Two west Alabama lawmakers - Republican Rep. John Merrill, R-Tuscaloosa, and Democrat Rep. Chris England - told the newspaper they have questions and more discussion is needed. Baugh **canceled plans to attend** a meeting with Tuscaloosa officials on Friday to talk about the local impact.

**See the complete Tuscaloosa News article.**

© 2012 al.com. All rights reserved.



Only the Mary Starke Harper Geriatric Facility and the under-construction replacement for Bryce Hospital in Tuscaloosa would remain open under current plans. The old Bryce Hospital in Tuscaloosa is shown here. (Birmingham News file photo/Tamika Moore)