



House passes General Fund budget, finds another \$3 million for prisons



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MONTGOMERY, Alabama --- The Alabama House of Representatives added \$3 million to a proposed increase for state prisons tonight before passing the General Fund budget bill for fiscal 2014.

The bill, which would spend about \$1.75 billion from the General Fund, a main source of state dollars for non-education agencies, now returns to the Senate, which had passed it earlier.

Rep. Steve Clouse, R-Ozark, who handled the bill in the House, said he expected a conference committee to be named to work out differences between the House and Senate versions.

The bill passed the House by a vote of 75-27.

Gov. Robert Bentley had proposed about a \$20 million General Fund increase for the Department of Corrections. [The Senate and the House Ways and Means General Fund Committee had reduced the proposed increase to about \\$14 million.](#) The House tonight

approved an amendment by Clouse to boost the prison system increase to about \$17 million.

Prison Commissioner Kim Thomas had said the \$14 million increase would not be enough to make some vital improvements in prisons, including changes at Tutwiler Prison for Women, where the Department of Justice is investigating conditions. About \$9 million of the increase would be used to cover mandatory increases in employment costs and inmate health care costs, Thomas said.

Clouse said he worked with Bentley's office on a plan to find another \$3 million for corrections. The \$17 million increase would boost the prison system's General Fund appropriation to about \$390 million.

The \$3 million was moved from 12 other appropriations in the budget. Among those were \$250,000 each from the departments of Environmental Management, Revenue and Mental Health, and \$200,000 from Examiners of Public Accounts, as well as \$250,000 from the Historical Commission that was earmarked for some historical sites.

The General Fund budget is almost level-funded from the current fiscal year. Proposed spending would rise by less than two-tenths of 1 percent.

The spending plan includes about \$145 million transferred from the Alabama Trust Fund to the General Fund under a constitutional amendment approved by voters in September. It will be the second of three consecutive years for the transfers, which will total about \$437 million.

In addition to the General Fund spending, the budget bill would appropriate about \$12.5 billion in other federal, state and local funds.