



Gov. Robert Bentley administers the oath of office to Jim Perdue. | Courtesy photo



By [Michele Gerlach](#)

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## Mental health head takes office

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On Tuesday, Jim Perdue closed out more than 13 years of work as probate judge of Crenshaw County.

Wednesday morning, Gov. Robert Bentley swore him in as Commissioner of Mental Health.

At 2 yesterday afternoon, Commissioner Perdue held his first budget meeting with department heads at the

Department of Mental Health.

Funding has to be his first priority, he said.

“The problems with mental health are there whether we have a budget or not. It’s not like they will fold and not occur,” he said. “The General Fund budget was vetoed by governor, so the legislature will be in special session around the middle of August. That gives me about 45 days to get ready to go to the legislature. It will be a crash course for me.”

While the budgeting portion of his job may require a crash course, the new commissioner is no stranger to the issues faced by his department. As probate judge, he was charged with mental health commitments. But he also has served as president of the South Central Alabama Mental Health Board, and is a member of the Alabama Mental Health Advisory Board of Trustees.

“Mental Health serves a very broad spectrum,” Perdue said. “We are responsible for those not guilty by reason of insanity held at Taylor Hardin, where it is hoped they can be treated and hopefully integrated back into society,” he said. “Then, there are those that are intellectually challenged and need care all of the time, whether in a hospital setting or at home.”

In addition, there are mental health services provided on an outpatient basis across the state, as well as partnerships with hospitals that provide mental health care.

As soon as he gets a grasp on the budget, Commissioner Perdue said he expects to see every facility.

The staff of the Department of Mental Health is superb, he said.

“They are passionate about their work, and dedicated,” he said. “You don’t get in to this just for the money; you get in it because you care. It’s the same with the South Central Alabama Mental Health Board. Those who serve care.”

Just before he was sworn in, Perdue was appointed to a newly-formed Alabama Criminal Justice Oversight and Implementation Council to oversee implementation of criminal justice reform approved by the legislature this year.

“Unfortunately, our prisons are full of people with mental problems,” Perdue said. “The biggest challenge of the system is mental illness is not any more curable than any other diseases. It’s treatable. But if you don’t treat it, it will reoccur.”

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