

State Repairs Prison as it Shuts it Down

by Hugh McQuaid | Jun 30, 2011 2:12pm

Since May, Bergin Correctional Institution has been in a precarious position. It was scheduled to close, taken off the chopping block, and recently ordered closed again. But throughout, the state has moved forward with a \$34,488 project to repair its perimeter fence.

The fence repair project, which initially included plans for the construction of new sally ports, began on April 25, according Department of Corrections spokesman Brian Garnett.

That was about two weeks before word spread that [the state intended to close](#) the minimum security prison in the absence of a tentative agreement between Gov. Dannel P. Malloy's administration and the State Employee Bargaining Agent Coalition.

At that point the sally port construction was put on hold, Garnett said, but the fence repair continued in case the facility needed to be used in the future.

Two weeks later an agreement was reached and officials said the prison would [no longer be closed on July 1](#).

However, the DOC seemed to continue to take steps to close the facility. The inmate population dropped sharply. At the beginning of the year 931 inmates were housed at Bergin, according to the department's website. By June that number was around 620, according to sources who said that as prisoners were released or transferred, new inmates were not transferred in.

New radios that had been ordered for Bergin correction officers arrived on site at the prison but they were never issued and eventually sent back, sources said.

The fence continued to be repaired.

On June 24, it became clear that state employee unions rejected the negotiated concession agreement, leaving a \$1.6 billion hole in the state budget for the next biennium. In an effort to help fill that gap the Malloy administration has ordered cuts to the DOC that amount to about 1,019 employee layoffs. It has also announced that [Bergin will be shuttered by Aug. 15](#).

But the empty prison will have a newly repaired perimeter fence if not new functional sally ports. Repairs were recently completed, Garnett said.

AFSCME Local 1565 President Luke Leone, whose union represents Bergin's correctional officers, said the state continued to make repairs to J.B. Gates Correctional Institution as it was closing. The theory is to have closed prisons ready to be reopened, should the need arise, he said.

"Do I think it's wise? No, I think it's a waste of money," he said.