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## Closing Webster Correctional Institution recommended

By Jesse Buchanan, Record-Journal staff

CHESHIRE - The state Department of Correction Tuesday recommended closing the minimum-security Webster Correctional Institution on Jarvis Street as a cost-cutting measure.

A date has not been set for the closure, which is expected to save \$3.4 million a year, according to Gov. M. Jodi Rell. She said the closure will not affect safety or cause overcrowding since the state's prison population has been declining.

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The total number of prisoners is 18,300, down from 19,900 in February 2008, according to Rell.

Webster holds about 220 inmates and has a number of pre-release programs. Two housing units of the prison's four were closed earlier this year.

Prison staff will be redeployed, according to Rell, and the closure will not result in any layoffs.

Moises Padilla, vice president of American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, Local 387, said he understood the need to cut costs, but said closing Webster would not result in significant savings and that the facility will only have to be reopened later.

"We know the cycles in recidivism and crime rates," said Padilla, a correction officer at Manson Youth Institution in Cheshire. "We know these are temporary measures."

Padilla predicted that parole and furlough rules would tighten and result in an increase in the prison population.

Town Manager Michael Milone said a closure would not affect payments from the state. The state payment in lieu of taxes amounts to \$2.1 million in annual revenue for the town and is calculated based on property value rather than the number of inmates. Those payments wouldn't be affected unless the state sold the property.

Milone was not sure whether state money from the Mashantucket Pequot grant, totaling about \$1.6 million a year, would be affected by a prison closure.

Cheshire is home to four prisons including Webster.

Fewer prisoners at the complex would mean lower payments to the town for wastewater treatment, Milone said, but it would also mean less effluent would be sent to the town's aging treatment plant.

"The benefit is it could also free up some capacity, which is critical for the system," he said.

One portion of the prison, the Webster Annex, will be kept open and used by Cheshire Correctional Institution, the high-security prison across Jarvis Street.

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