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## **New Idaho prisons to ask lawmakers for higher officer pay**

By REBECCA BOONE, Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — The new director of the Idaho Department of Correction is asking lawmakers to approve a significant pay increase for experienced prison staffers in hopes of reducing the department's high turnover rate.

Kevin Kempf told members of the Joint Finance-Appropriations Committee on Wednesday that it costs about \$15,000 to hire and train a new correctional officer, but the majority of them are leaving the department within two years.

More than half of Idaho's prison supervisors and about 64 percent of the state's correctional officers have less than two years' experience. Inexperience and high turnover rates are often found to be contributing factors to prison riots elsewhere, and the problem could put Idaho at risk, Kempf said.

He's asking lawmakers to give experienced staffers a 6 percent raise this year, followed by a 5 percent increase next year. New staffers would also get a 6 percent increase after completing their first year on the job, followed by the chance of merit-based pay raises of 4 percent for each of the next several years.

The pay increase, dubbed the "security retention plan" in Kempf's budget, would cost an additional \$2.2 million in the first year. The security staffers would also be eligible for the proposed 3 percent increase that lawmakers are considering for all state employees, which would mean about \$2.8 million for the Correction Department.

Pay is the primary reason the department loses staffers, Kempf said. New employees are assigned to a field training officer to help them learn the ropes on the new job, and it's not long before they realize that the experienced training officer is making only 35 cents more an hour than the entry-level worker, he said.

"Couple that with just the stress that's involved in working in a prison system every single day ... and it's a lot on that new officer to stop when they walk into a Jamba Juice and see a 'help wanted' sign," Kempf said. "We're losing staff members to those types of organizations."

Jobs at businesses like Jamba Juice pay roughly the same as the prison system but have less stressful working conditions, he said.

"It is not lost on me that I could be back in front of you in two or three years having just been given a lot of money with a turnover rate that is not the same," Kempf told lawmakers.

The other half of the security retention plan involves helping employees "grow roots" within the agency, he said. The department will closely monitor which prisons have low turnover rates and which ones have high turnover rates and work to understand what factors make employees decide to stay or leave the department.

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