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*For Immediate Release...*

## *Corrections News*

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### Department to Ban Inmates From Soliciting Pen Pals on Websites

Acting upon the recommendation of an Offender Fraud Committee he formed in 2005, Missouri Department of Corrections Director Larry Crawford announced today the Department will ban offenders from soliciting pen pals on the internet. The ban takes effect June 1<sup>st</sup>.

“During our review, we have identified numerous offenders who, through misleading web postings and photos, have solicited thousands of dollars from individuals and have devised other creative and purposeful intents to defraud the public,” said Department Constituent Services Officer Lisa Jones, who chaired the Committee.

Crawford praised the Committee, saying its findings have resulted in several changes in the Department’s operations. Crawford says increased vigilance has resulted in the confiscation of thousands of dollars from offenders to pay for cost of their incarceration, when it was determined those funds had been obtained through misrepresentation and solicitation in websites.

Missouri’s approximately 29,900 inmates received a letter this month from Division of Adult Institutions Director Terry Moore. The letter describes the ban and the June 1<sup>st</sup> effective date. The letter also reminds offenders it is their responsibility to ensure that their name and advertisement is removed, if they are a member of any pen-pal website. Failure to do so, or future efforts to post ads on a website soliciting pen pals, will result in a conduct violation. The Department will monitor pen-pal websites for compliance.

Director Crawford announced the ban in a memo to Department staff.

“Any time you verify an offender is intentionally defrauding the public, it is our responsibility to confront and counsel them and hold them responsible for their actions,” Crawford wrote in the memo. “By everyone working together we can hold offenders accountable and reduce offender fraudulent activities.”

Missouri offenders do not have access to the internet. The Department’s website has contained an Inmate Fraud Alert since 2005. Crawford encouraged anyone with information about possible fraudulent activity to contact the website, which is [www.doc.mo.gov](http://www.doc.mo.gov).

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The ban, which takes effect June 1<sup>st</sup>, means offenders will no longer be allowed to participate in or post ads on any website soliciting pen pals.

The Department of Corrections will monitor pen-pal websites for compliance.

“By everyone working together, we can hold offenders accountable and reduce offender fraudulent activities.”

Director Larry Crawford