

## Tuscaloosa mayor blasts state leaders for underfunding



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TUSCALOOSA, Ala. (WIAT) — Fiery words from the mayor of Tuscaloosa follow a dramatic spike in violent crime.

The city has seen four homicides from just the first two weeks of 2016.

Responding to the rash of violence in Tuscaloosa, Mayor Walt Maddox criticized the way state leaders have funded criminal justice, corrections, pardons and paroles, and mental health services.

“Unfortunately with declining state revenues these services which directly impact every single citizen of Tuscaloosa are strained to the point that it’s jeopardizing public safety,” said Maddox.

Lawmakers made cuts in a number of areas last year including law enforcement initiatives. Faced with a prison overcrowding crisis the state is also implementing a prison reform plan that some have criticized as too soft on crime. Maddox is urging citizens to get involved in the upcoming legislative session.

“The rhetoric of slashing government may make for effective sound bites, but the practical matter is, is that this revolving door of criminal justice is creating havoc in our communities. It is leading to individuals who served time, if any, to come out of a system ill prepared for a modern work world. Thus the only viable option is going to lead back to a life of crime. In short our officers are arresting and re-arresting the same individuals. And in too many crimes committed in Tuscaloosa we see the same individuals who have absolutely no fear of the state’s criminal justice system,” said Maddox.

“Prisons are filled to 190% capacity and the only remedy is to downsize without adequate resources in place for education, substance abuse counseling and job training. The flawed remedy of releasing people from prison without the needed infrastructure is creating a crisis, but these emergencies are being felt in Alabama’s largest cities,” he continued.

Alabama Governor Robert Bentley twice rejected the budgets proposed by the State Legislature in 2015 over a lack of funding for state

programs.

Ultimately the Governor and the legislature reached a compromise and Bentley is now defending the direction state prisons are headed. Bentley tells WIAT that the Alabama Department of Corrections has a good leader with very innovative ideas to improve the system.

“We passed a very good prison reform act. We’re working to refine that and we will continue to work on that. We have some great announcements that you will be hearing in the state of the state dealing with our prison system. And we will be discussing in fact I’m going to Washington next week to discuss to discuss with the president on the federal level what we’re doing in Alabama,” said Bentley.

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