

Jeb Bush plans to build a faith-based prison: A "clearly unconstitutional scheme"

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Florida Governor Jeb Bush has announced the creation of what he calls the nation's first entirely faith-based prison at a facility in his state. Bush made the announcement in Tampa at a conference sponsored by his brother's White House Office of Faith-based and Community Initiatives.

The governor's plan is for more than 790 inmates to live in eight dormitories at the Lawtey Correctional Institution in Raiford. Participation by inmates is voluntary, and entry into the program will not depend on the inmate's faith preference or lack of faith. The volunteers involved in faith-based programs will focus on such issues as family life, personal growth and life skills.

"For those individuals who are motivated to change their lives, programs like this can make a tremendous difference and create a pathway out of the criminal justice system," Bush said.

He applauded the work done by the office instituted by President Bush as well as the efforts by Attorney General John Ashcroft to recognize faith-based organizations. "It is imperative for government to work in close and careful coordination with community and faith-based organizations because government alone will never solve the problems tearing the fabric of our society," he said.

Barry Lynn, executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, criticized the governor's plan. "This is a clearly unconstitutional scheme," he said in a statement. "A state can no more create a faith-based prison than it could set up faith-based public schools or faith-based police departments." -*Religion News Service*