

# Agency's temporary leader is a seasoned, savvy veteran

**Bishop L. Robinson brings wide-ranging experience to post at juvenile justice**

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SUN STAFF

In naming Bishop L. Robinson to preside over the state's troubled juvenile justice agency, Gov. Parris Glendening turned to an elder statesman whose years of experience in Annapolis and love affair with the state legislature stand in marked contrast to the man he will replace.

The 72-year-old former state prisons chief retired from government in 1997 for a consultant's job with Lockheed Martin, leaving what he called at the time the "thankless, winless job" of managing 22,000 inmates.

But since then, he's been unable to completely separate from public life, finding himself sought out frequently as the answer to leadership voids.

Last summer, he was courted as a Baltimore mayoral candidate to add clout and experience to what was seen as an immature field. After flirting with the idea, Robinson decided he didn't want the job.

So why now would he want this one — presiding over an agency that on Tuesday he pronounced a

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"mess"?

"I don't want the job," Robinson said yesterday. "I'm just here because they don't have anybody."

James P. McComb, chairman of the Maryland Juvenile Justice Coalition, an umbrella organization representing 46 advocacy groups, applauded Robinson's selection as the agency's temporary administrator. "He is a fine man, a smart administrator and he has managed bigger tasks than this," McComb said.

Robinson has agreed only to be a short-term savior. Michelle Byrnie, the governor's press secretary, said he is to serve only 30 to 45 days, on "executive loan" from Lockheed while Glendening searches for a new department secretary.

In that time, Robinson said, he intends to try to establish a system of internal controls.

"The credibility of the agency has to be preserved," he said. "I think there's a lot to be done, and

I'm going to sit down and methodically proceed through this organization, familiarize myself with it more, determine what changes are necessary. I think there's a chance we can help many of these youngsters."

That's a chance Robinson longed for while running the state's prisons.

Robinson grew up in the McCulloh Homes of West Baltimore, and rose from a beat cop to become Baltimore's police commissioner as a protege of then-Mayor William Donald Schaefer. When he became governor, Schaefer took Robinson with him to Annapolis.

At the end of his 10-year tenure there, Robinson became increasingly frustrated by the ceaseless parade of inmates cycling in and out of his system and dissatisfied with the lock-them-up response to crime that he learned as a police officer.

He became a staunch advocate for education reforms, urging legislators to pump money into Baltimore's public schools so that young people would not turn to crime.

Richard A. Lanham Sr., who was commissioner of correction under Robinson and has known him for 40 years, said the two often used to talk about the fact that by the time they got prisoners, it was often too late to do anything to change their behavior.

"He and I often talked about the fact that you have really got to go back and begin at the beginning," Lanham said. "Now he has an opportunity, under very difficult circumstances, to at least get something started. Knowing it could have a major, major impact, I think he definitely would relish the idea of doing it."