

Submission
No 325

**INQUIRY INTO THE PRIVATISATION OF PRISONS AND
PRISON-RELATED SERVICES**

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially Confidential

Parliamentary Enquiry into the Privatisation of Prisons and Prison-Related Services

To the Members of the Committee,

I wish to express my concern regarding the privatisation of prisons especially related to the safety of staff and inmates. It has been seen in other areas where private enterprise is involved, that actions to improve profit margins develop after a period of time when public scrutiny is not as intense. These actions can include the reduction of staffing levels, loss of services, increasing costs to services provided, and lower levels of service.

Reducing staff levels would compromise the safety of staff and inmates. Slower response times to emergencies and less staff to assist in emergencies would be examples that would endanger the safety of staff and inmates. Less staff would also make access to other services including health care, especially the difficult area of Mental Health services, education and rehabilitation opportunities difficult. Should these services be provided by other organisations, eg TAFE and Department of Health, their staff would also have access to inmates reduced and personal safety compromised.

Reducing staff levels also increases the risk of inmates leaving the prison environment, earlier than they should. This involves escapes, absconding and mistakes made in paperwork. This increases risk to the community whether through re-offending or threats made to victims and witnesses to previous crimes.

We need to remember that the people serving out sentences in gaols are often the people that the general community does not want to mix with, and yet Prison Officers work effectively with these people on a daily basis with minimal episodes of violence and few escapes from gaols. Prison Officers are specifically trained to cope with situations that could "turn ugly" and yet they are able to intervene successfully and bring positive solutions in very difficult situations.

We also need to remember that safety to the community starts when inmates are placed into custody from the courts. This can be a time of high stress for the individual and Prison Officers are the ones who bear the brunt of emotional and violent outbursts from new inmates. Prison Officers keep inmates safe during these times of high stress, and well trained and experienced men and women are needed at this difficult time.

While the standing of private security staff in the community should not be compromised, where will the companies seeking to staff these areas obtain staff with the training and experience found in the Prison Officers currently serving in our Gaols?

Thank you for this opportunity