

Submission
No 251

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

Name: Name suppressed
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Partially Confidential

The Director
General Purpose Standing Committee No.3
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

26 February 09

Dear Director

I am a NSW Correctional Officer with 11 years experience. I have worked at the Metropolitan Medical Transit Centre at Long Bay and am now working in Court Escort Security at a 24-hour regional location. My submission will refer to my experience and observations regarding my 'prison and related services' position of Court Escort Security, and general observations and arguments about privatisation of prisons in general.

My role in court escort security is to receive inmates from Police, take them to court and manage them (if refused bail) in the court holding cells until they are transferred to a correctional centre. We also house inmates that arrive from various gaols to appear in court. My job also involves escorting mixed-category prisoners to hospital as required, and working closely with Police; on many occasions we assist with difficult people they have in custody.

Due to mismanagement by Corrective Services, our location, as well as other Court Escort Security Units around NSW, are also used as a (unofficial) mini gaol. Against departmental policy, inmates are kept here (court cells) for up to 10 days following bail refusal or court sentencing instead of being transferred to prison. This situation has now become the norm and is even impacting on courtroom decisions. Magistrates at our local court are now telling inmates they have factored in the amount of time spent 'downstairs' (cells) in the decision whether to grant bail. Inmates are also sent here from other Sydney court centres and Surry Hills Cells, instead of transferring to gaols. This is because there are no beds available in the gaols. Unlike prisons, inmates staying in court cells have no access to fresh air, no visits, limited access to lawyers, no phone calls and limited (inside) exercise.

Our centre is staffed to service the courts and take fresh custodies from the Police, not look after those 'transit' inmates who are here because there is no room for them in prison. Extra staff is obviously needed to look after inmates if they are to be treated in a humane way, hence the overtime is needed. Quite often, because our cells are full of these 'transit' inmates we are not able to perform our core role – accepting fresh custodies (inmates) from the police. This means that police are taken away from their duties to look after inmates at the police station.

I have made the above points because I want the committee to understand that 'prison related services' such as court escort security are actually much more than prison related, they are an integral part of the prison system and this enquiry needs to reflect that. My duties duplicate, and more, those of a Correctional Officer working in a prison. Court Escort Security is not separate from the prison system. It is an essential, entrenched part of NSW prisons.

Corrective Services is in chaos. There are too many inmates, too few beds and nowhere near enough Correctional Officers to deal with this number (people?) shuffling madness. Inmate numbers have increased by approximately 60% over the last 10 years and whilst the department will not proportionately increase beds/build new gaols/employ adequate officers, the only solution is to allocate officers extra shifts to look after these prisoners. This, of course, means huge overtime payments. From my perspective working in Court Escort Security, the overtime solution is simple – transfer inmates to prison (where they should be), don't keep them in court cells.

Of course this is ridiculously simplistic, but no more than (former corrective services minister) John Hatzistergos' disgusting and shameful comments alluding to sick leave and rotting being blamed for the massive overtime blowout. Equally reprehensible is Commissioner Ron Woodham's remarks that overtime rosters had been manipulated. I believe that Corrective Services does have a high rate of sick leave. If this is so, is that really surprising? Exhaustion and working in a continually stressful, overcrowded environment whilst dealing with disdainful, unsupportive senior management is demoralising and enough to make anyone sick.

I have worked double shifts, have been rung after arriving home from work to go back again, have been phoned at 2 and 3am in to see if I could come into work early. I've been rung on my days off and most times, out of a sense of obligation, I will go into work and, yes, work overtime. Of course I'm glad to get the money but that's incidental. The rosters are **not** manipulated, as Ron Woodham very well knows, there are set procedures that are followed by all officers as to who is called for overtime – overtime is only given when absolutely necessary and must be authorised. There is too much overtime because there aren't enough officers to cover shifts. The reason there isn't enough Correctional Officers is that it is cheaper to pay overtime than employ new officers. **The Department needs and authorises overtime, then blames officers who actually do the overtime shifts.** These officers are then used as leverage in the privatisation debate.

Upper echelons of Corrective Services have tried to sell privatisation as the only way to achieve workplace reform, but this is simply not the case. Reforms are already in place that has been generally accepted by prison officers. Three NSW prisons operate under "The Way Forward"; Kempsey, Wellington and Dillwynia at Windsor, as will a soon-to-be-built prison at Nowra. There is also a degree of privatisation in many other prisons, with boom gates and perimeter fence patrols conducted by private firms.

Privately run prisons, like all businesses will always look to make a profit. Safety of the public, Correctional Officers and inmates **will** be compromised. Procedures and quality control demanded of Government run organisations will not be put in place. The private corporation will have it's own agenda; it's own quality control that will not be able to match those of Government run prisons. There are numerous examples of profit before safety all around the world. In New Zealand a 'protection' inmate was murdered in a prison van. He had been placed with mainstream inmates who were on their way from court to prison. The private company didn't want to spend extra money transporting just 1 prisoner. Major contract breaches, repeated escapes, excessive illegal drug use and inadequate staffing were some of the reasons the Victorian Government took back control of the Metropolitan Woman's Correctional Centre. In June 1993 (3 months after the official opening) 30 prisoners rioted. In 1994 there was an escape, a murder and three prison officers assaulted. Studies from overseas and within Australia consistently show that assaults and escapes are much more prevalent in privately run gaols.

Safeguards are meaningless in a 'work to contract' type culture, which is espoused by profit driven and outsourcing organisations. It is impossible to cover every single nuance of every job description in any contract, ensuring best practice and excellence in quality control will not be adhered to. My work with Court Escort Security entails so much more than the 'job description' of this position, so much so that our duty of care to inmates would be severely compromised if we ever just performed our core duties. What would a privately run unit do? It is impossible to make a profit and deliver humane care. . . .

Our (Court Escort Security) unit is one of many where the courthouse and police station adjoin, as do court cells and police cells. We are given special access and passes to enter the police station after hours. I have spoken to many police officers that feel it is totally inappropriate for private operators to access police cells.

Corrective Services Officers are highly trained to deal with inmates with mental health issues, aggressive inmates and inmates with alcohol and drug related problems. We are also trained to recognise inmates at risk of self-harm and to intervene appropriately. Will private corporations provide such extensive, ongoing training? GEO, the giant American Co-operation that runs Junee Corrections Centre trains officers for 4-8 weeks, according to its website. Corrective Services Academy provides 12 week intense training to its officers.

How will programs, rehabilitation and mental health support services be administered effectively by a profit driven business? What corners will be cut and to what expense of inmates and the wider community?

How can recidivism be properly supported by a private corporation who's business/profit margin is driven by having as many prisoners stay as long as possible? The conflict of interest is too huge to ignore.

It is argued that privatisation will reduce labour costs, netting substantial savings for the NSW Government. However, numerous studies and research into private prisons in the United States and other parts of the world casts doubts on the validity of these claims.

In order to save money, I believe the structure of Corrective Services needs to be scrutinised carefully. The Department is 'top heavy' with management positions, this is causing friction and low morale within officer ranks – the trimming should start at the top.

All sections of Corrective Services should remain in public hands, run by our highly trained, professional staff. Incarceration of human beings should not be done to make a profit, or responsibility given away because of mismanagement or because it falls into the too hard basket. **PEOPLE MUST COME BEFORE PROFIT.**

Yours sincerely