

Submission
No 9

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

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The question that the Committee should be addressing itself to is whether privatisation will ultimately prove to be cost effective.
I have serious doubts about this.

The current over-crowding of the Correctional system has been predominantly caused, I believe, by the decade-long bi-partisan promotion of law and order as an electoral issue. Furthermore, the accompanying trend towards incarcerating the mentally ill, (rather than to providing proper treatment facilities and post-treatment programs), has elevated the number of prisoners entering into the system. The mentally ill are continually released back into the community post-treatment. This works well when they obey the law. It fails abysmally when they do not; for the prisoners concerned; their victims, and for their families. Surely the revolving door approach to the mentally ill in our court and prison systems has failed?

Serious ethical questions should be raised about whether this situation should be allowed to continue, not only from an international human rights point of view, but also from an acknowledgement that we are wasting people's lives, and that we are failing to draw on their talents.

It would be more worthwhile for you, as our legislators, to promote programs that seek to prevent individuals from falling into a downward spiral which ultimately leads to their incarceration. This means welfare programs, decent schooling, and programs to identify and treat drug-addiction and mental illness in a proper and preventative fashion. This also means fostering employment levels and growth, so that people have access to the best-possible opportunities in life. Real and substantive reform, not just the band-aid approach.

Speaking as the de-facto of a Correctional Officer, I also have a personal interest in the outcome of this inquiry. I find it deplorable that staff and their families must learn about their future through the media, rather than through direct communication from the Minister and his chief Bureaucrats. It does nothing for morale. It does nothing for each of us as we seek to plan our own futures beyond a life revolving around Corrections.

It is also reprehensible that Correctional staff are blamed for the levels of overtime, (an issue ultimately controlled by senior management, and which has nothing to do with junior staff). The Department has always had the power to say "NO" to a request for overtime, (either before or after its occurrence). In the meantime, I, and other families, anxiously await the safe return of our loved ones from a work-place where injury or death is a very real possibility. Surely Public Servants deserve better treatment than this?

My partner is employed in the Court Escort Security end of the Department, which is also facing privatisation. The sell-off will not lead to a reduction in costs, as operations of courts will always lead to overtime, regardless of whether there is a private or public operator involved. Furthermore, transport staff cannot leave prisoners by the side of the road, (in heavy traffic or bad weather), just because it is "knock-off" time.

It would be better, in my view, to look at the section-by-section break-down of staff-numbers, and to re-write position descriptions to ensure that all staff fill in whenever overtime arises. The resulting reduction on expenses would also be more immediate and the workplace more flexible. It may, in fact, be time to eradicate a rank-based structure, in favour of a leaner, flatter organisation, that promotes creativity and innovation in the workplace, and which leads to better programs and improved staff morale. You currently have a situation where only two ranks are involved in direct service delivery.

