

Submission
No 277

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

Name: Mr Corey O'Donnell

Date received: 24/02/2009

Parliamentary Enquiry Submission

I have been employed by the department for a period of 7 years which is a short term compared to some of my colleagues at Cessnock Correctional Centre. I was told on the 4th November 2008 that I had gained a promotion at Cessnock Correctional Centre as a Senior Correctional Officer. This statement is tendered in accordance with the **Terms of Reference**; Point 7 any other relevant materials.

For this I will use the falling points.

1. Family Background
2. My Career and Career Opportunities
3. Overtime Culture
4. Dollars per head versus Officer and Community safety

Family Background

I grew up in the local area at Speers Point which is 35kms from Cessnock Correctional Centre; I lived there for some 19 years until I joined the NSW Corrective Services in 2002. My mother and father both owned a local general business store until my parents' health declined and they were unable to continue the business in 1997.

I have been an involved in many community activities which include being a member of the NSW Fire Brigade and was stationed at Boolaroo. I represented the Hunter Region for Australian Rules in 1993 in the under 16 championships. I played 60 games of first grade Australian Football for Warners Bay in the Black Diamond Australian Rules Football League.

I left the Hunter region in 2002 to start my career with the NSW Department Of Corrective Services I've always had aspirations of returning to the Hunter Region and in particular to Cessnock Correctional Centre. I have worked my way to the rank of Senior Correctional Officer.

I have a young family and have always had intentions of raising my children in the Hunter Region, the recent announcement that Cessnock Correctional Centre will be privatised has jeopardised my job security and the plans I have for myself and my family.

I have some major issues which I wish to raise in the preceding pages of this submission.

My Career and Career Opportunities

Since joining the Department Of Corrective Services in 2002 I have been a highly motivated person from the commencement of my employment. I was awarded the Officer of the class at the academy in 2002. I commenced employment at Long Bay Correctional Centre in August 2002. I have a personal ambition to get as high up the

promotion ladder as possible. I gained the rank of Senior Correctional Officer in 2005 at Dillwynia Correctional Centre after just three years in the job. I recently won a position at Cessnock Correctional Centre and moved my family to the Hunter Region fulfilling my desire to return to the area I grew up in and be close to my family support network. The Hunter community provides a much more family friendly and laid back environment in which to raise a family. With the announcement that Cessnock Correctional Centre is to be privatised, myself and my work colleagues are faced with the prospect of losing our jobs or losing the lifestyle we value and upheaving our families to go to another Correctional Centre where there is no certainty that we will be there permanently either.

OT Culture

When I joined the NSWDCS I was informed by Assistant Superintendent at the Academy that the NSWDCS ran on Overtime as it was cheaper to place an officer on a post in a gaol on Overtime than to train another Probationary Correctional Officer to perform the duties of an officer who has been unable to attend work. I was informed that it costs around \$60000 to train a Probationary Correctional Officer at the Academy, combine that with the Workers Compensation Levy and Insurances and it is better for Senior Management to have staff on overtime.

I asked the question "Why are we being trained then?" the Assistant Superintendent said to me "You are here to boost the numbers up of staff within the ranks as we are currently losing around 1000 officers a year and we bring in 500 new recruits a year."

So this was my first understanding of the OT Culture at the academy my first week of training I was told to expect to earn a good salary.

After I finished my primary training course of 12 weeks I commenced my employment at Long Bay Hospital Area 2. I commenced work and the amount of officers was in deficit by 20 officers on a daily basis. It is management's decision to choose an area to be locked down because of staff shortages. Each gaol is allocated a specific amount of hours for daily overtime e.g. Long Bay Hospital Area 2 daily allocation is 80 hours or 10 officers a day on overtime

It is common practice for some gaols to have unlimited Overtime as that these gaols are remand gaols and the DCS as a policy of restricting lockdowns in these gaols as they perceive that it does more bad than good in a Remand Facility to leave these inmates secured in their cells then let them out for recreation.

Recently the NSWDCS Commissioner and the former Minister of Corrective Services have recently been in the media portraying officers as rorters in relation to overtime. I am hoping this parliamentary enquiry could ask the Minister and Commissioner why is the Overtime Culture so predominate within this department. Is this purely because the department as created the culture through its mismanagement?

When accusations of Overtime Rorting were made in October 2008 Correctional Officers unanimously decided to refuse to do overtime as a union to illustrate the discrepancies and the mismanagement of Department of Corrective Services. The Department took the Prison Officers Vocational Branch or POVVB which is the union for the officers to the industrial relation commission in December 2008 to direct us to lift overtime bans. The Department has taken the POVVB to the Industrial Relations Commission on 3 separate occasions which has resulted in Officers being directed to do overtime as directed by the Department as it can't function without it.

The offender population has increased by 61% over the past 10 years yet the staffing population of frontline officers hasn't changed. This Department has been mismanaged since I have been apart of the organisation and it is the frontline officers who face all these consequences from mismanagement of the Department Corrective Services.

It is clear and evident that the Department Of Corrective Services decision to close Parklea and Cessnock Correctional Centres is no more than union bashing which was evident more than ever on the first day of this public enquiry on 23rd February 2009.

Dollars per head versus Officer and Community safety

The Department of Corrective Service in an attempt to curb expenditure throughout the corrective system implemented a reform program or consent award known as The Way Forward at 3 newly constructed correctional centres being Dillwynia, Kempsey and Wellington. These centres are being run as closely as possible to the model on which June Correctional Centre is based. The above centres are run as private industries and are measured by cost per head. We are dealing with criminals and people who are some of society's worst elements.

In August 2005 I applied for and was successful in gaining a promotion to Senior Correctional Officer at the Dillwynia facility. Dillwynia was originally constructed as a programs gaol for female offenders which was to focus on gender specific programs. With the overcrowding of the female system it was soon changed to a remand facility with little or no concession to safety concerns to having maximum security offenders. *THE STAFFING PROFILE WAS NOT CHANGED AND THE CENTRE WAS RUN AS A PROGRAMS GAOL WITH A MINIMUM LEVEL OF SECURITY.* It is all about saving dollars which is putting Officer's as well as public safety at risk. The Centre on its opening was staffed largely with newly recruited officers fresh out of the Academy who thought the work practices they were engaging in were acceptable and common to all facilities. Having worked in Long Bay, a maximum security centre, for the past 3 years I quickly had concerns about the level of security provided by this reform. On numerous occasions I voiced my concerns to Senior Management only to be labelled a troublemaker. Thinking I could make a difference and ensure the safety and security of myself and my colleagues I became the Union Delegate for the centre. An example of the safety issues I had concerns with: - As per minimum security standards only 15% of female offenders leaving visits were searched. When the issue was raised with the Manager of Security that ALL inmates should be searched when leaving visits (this is the main way that drugs are smuggled into gaols), I was again being labelled a troublemaker and pushing the union line.

On the 10th December 2005 an inmate who had not been searched upon leaving visits was followed by a fellow officer to her housing unit and was observed to have acquired a quantity of morphine and rhohypnol tablets. Once realising she had been observed by the officer, in an attempt to hide the drugs the inmate swallowed the lot resulting in an overdose. Staff were required to use force to contain the inmate, which resulted in a number of staff being assaulted, myself included. After the assault, I questioned again if my concerns were legitimate or I was just being a troublemaker.

These centres have a huge turnover of staff due to the safety concerns and I would go so far as saying that any officer who has left Dillwynia now know that the operational procedures at this centre compared to those other than Kempsey and Wellington have a much greater level of safety and security.

My wish is for this enquiry to get access to all transfer lists within the Department and the above statement can be justified by the number of people on the transfer list for Wellington, Kempsey and Dillwynia compared to all other facilities.

Under the management of a private contractor they have Key Performance Indicators which include 2 deaths in custody per year, 2 riots a year, and 2 escapes per year. This is an unacceptable practice as it affects the community and staff who are faced with the consequences. Real estate prices around a privately contracted correctional centre have lead to up to 30% drop in property value.

I am affected greatly by the privatisation of Cessnock like many of my colleagues which just can't see the benefit of the change all because the Government cannot take responsibility for its own mismanagement.

This whole process is nothing but Union bashing from a Commissioner who is unable to manage effectively and efficiently and who lacks the necessary negotiation skills to work with frontline officers and their union.

For your consideration,

Corey O'Donnell
Senior Correctional Officer
Cessnock Correctional Centre