

Submission
No 401

INQUIRY INTO THE PRIVATISATION OF PRISONS AND PRISON-RELATED SERVICES

Organisation:

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Partially Confidential

I would like to thank the committee for this opportunity.

Yes, I do believe that my family and I will be affected by the proposed Way Forward restructure, as I work in a remote country court location. I stated that I believe so because my department has been threatening the privatising of court and escorts for quiet some time now, however the department has not and will not reveal any information about our future. Our Commissioner has told parliament that he has spoken to the staff of Albury and Wagga court escort security units about the proposed restructure. The only information that these two locations have received is via a generic email which was sent to each and every staff member in the department.

Our Commissioner has stated numerous times that no officer needs to loose his/her job, however some may need to relocate. Most officers working in country locations are doing so because the Department of Corrective Services undertook a commitment to operate these locations, with the department offering these positions to the people now working in these locations. For most, the relocation some hundreds of kilometres from where we have set up our family and homes is not a viable option, re-employment in country locations is scarce in the best of times. The current economic situation will only further exacerbate this.

There have been numerous allegations made regarding abuse of and excessive overtime, which has resulted in budget blowouts. It is a fact that there is excessive overtime within all aspects of government run corrections. This is largely due to the chronic lack of staff across the state. This is why the department has begun employing some 300 casual officers to reign in the overtime and is further proof of the staff shortage that exists, 150 permanent officers would be better. There have been in recent times industrial action in regards to overtime, as a result of adverse media releases, allegations and the employment of casuals by the department, which the department has had listed before the Industrial Commission. This proves the department knows that without overtime being worked most Correctional centres, Transport and Court locations could not function wholly and satisfactorily to meet the needs of the NSW judicial system.

My union, the Prison Officers Vocational Branch, along with the Public Service Association of NSW are willing to participate in a cost effective restructure of our department. This is evident with the introduction of the Way Forward reforms at the Mid North Coast Correctional Centre, Dillwynia Correctional Centre and Wellington Correctional Centre. We as responsible adults and professional Correctional Officers understand the current economical situation of the Department of Corrective Services and of the NSW Government as a whole. Apart from the three centres mentioned above our department has not and will not partake in meaningful consultation regarding further cost effectiveness of our existing commitments. There is no doubt that prisons, transport and court locations can and should be ran more cost effective, but this requires co-operation from the Department and Government.

Our Commissioner has stated that the current proposed reforms have been approved by the NSW Budget Committee as part of the mini budget (11/11/08). This may be the case but was the committee fully briefed of the contents of the restructure. Is it not the case that the current reforms were introduced to parliament very late in proceedings without detailing the full content of the proposed reforms, is it not the case that parliament were told that the Department of Corrective Services would implement the Way Forward as part of its cost cutting measures, and that there were no mention of privatising prisons or prison related services at this particular sitting.

Mr Rees, our Premier has stated that no front line positions will be jeopardised as a result of the mini budget, however these proposed reforms will jeopardise 1000 or more front line positions across the state of NSW. There have been no reforms mentioned for the upper management of any of our regional or head offices.

Since 1988 the prison population has increased from around 6,000 to over 10,000. The reasons for this increase are many, but without doubt changes to the Bail Act of NSW, Sentencing Legislation and the detention of Juveniles by the State Governments have contributed. Yet the State Government over the same period of time have not increased the front line staffing levels or correctional facilities to accommodate and manage the increase. However, over this same period of time the senior management of the Department of Corrective Services has grown to unrealistic levels.

I urge this committee to make a comparison of front line staff to that of management, especially management positions located off site from say 1990 to 2000, 2000 to 2009. I believe this will show some insight into the non cost effectiveness of Corrective Services. Even our Prime Minister Mr Rudd, has appealed to companies to be patient during the current economic crisis and to try and retain staff.

It is documented, so we are told, that NSW needed one privately ran prison to benchmark the Government ran prisons and services. Junee Correctional Centre became that privately ran centre in 1993. Government Centres and Junee Correctional Centre are and have never been compared on equal standings. Only when an equal comparison is undertaken between Junee and a similar size government prison comparing all aspects of prison related costs, by a committee such as this, will the people of NSW know whether private prisons are the most cost effective and viable way of incarcerating people. Can this committee be guaranteed that once a tender is let, the people of NSW will not incur further costs to transport prisoners to and from a private centre and or medical costs at the private centre? Will the prisoners have exactly the same access to programs, education and welfare services as government ran centres?

Department of Corrective Services became involved in court transport and court duties because of our professional training in this area, it also enabled more police to police our communities. In this role we supply a service to the Police Department and the Attorney Generals Department as well as the people of NSW. This is a service that should not be profited from by multi national companies. Will a private company supply the exact same service that we do now given most court locations operate without any medical, welfare and catering staff? Staff employed in these locations fulfil these duties along with keeping the prisoners and the public safe from each other. Can this committee be satisfied that there will be no conflict of interest regarding the privatising of transport and court duties. Currently professional Correctional Officers cannot work in the security industry as secondary employment but this is not the case for the staff employed by GEO Australia.

Whether or not a prison or prison related services are privatised the NSW Government has to budget for the incarceration of societies undesirables. The cost of this on the tax paying people of NSW should at all times be considered. It is after all a public service, just the same as the NSW Police Service and the Attorney Generals Department. It is surely a strange concept when tax payers have to pay for privatising.

Recently Wakenhut America, the parent company of GEO Australia released a document claiming that GEO had recently achieved the status of preferred tenderer for Corrections in NSW with the resigning of the contract for Junee, which with options will give GEO the control of Junee for the next 15 years. It further states that this will generate 21 million dollars annually for their share holders. This is outrageous especially given our current economic climate. If this much profit or any profit for that matter can be made from prisons and or prison related services then should it not go back to the people of NSW? It must be remembered that GEO Australia was formerly known as ACM, changing their name after the Immigration Detention Centre issues of South and Western Australia a few years ago.

I have not made any formal research into the privatising of prisons or prison related services. These opinions and views are of my experiences as a professional Correctional Officer since 1990. I am therefore opposed to the privatising of prisons and prison related services.