

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

Name: Name suppressed
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Partially Confidential

Inquiry into the privatisation of prisons and prison related services

My submission does not deal directly with the terms of reference of the inquiry but provides an insight into causes of overtime and the effect of privatisation within the Court Escort Security Unit.

I am a current serving correctional officer working in a 24 hour court location. I cannot produce statistics and figures of the difference between the public versus private model but have concerns as to the motivation for privatisation. I find it extremely difficult to read and hear about the good work of Correctional Officers being portrayed by our Commissioner and media as overtime rorters and abusers of sick leave entitlements. I believe we have a serious problem of a correctional service that has lacked foresight and mismanagement into an ever increasing prison population. As we all know the privatisation path has been borne about by the failure of management to manage overtime within acceptable levels. It is quite obvious that money budgeted to the Department is an unrealistic figure of \$20 million per year and should itself ring alarm bells that maybe the Department is under funded. What are the true figures of staff increases in line with inmate population growth? We want to hear the true figures of frontline custodial officers on the ground to inmate numbers. All the smoke and mirrors are starting to wear a bit thin. It is well known that the Department is top heavy. The focus should be at the frontline.

I should not have to justify the overtime issues that are created in my workplace and the reasons for it but feel it may provide insight as to why it occurs.

1. Transit Inmates:

These are fresh custody inmates that have been bail refused by the court and are awaiting placement to a correctional centre. We have inmates that have been held in our cells for a period of up to ten (10) days. For these inmates to be managed in police cells requires extra staff to be called in to supervise and implement the Department's mission of managing inmates in a secure and humane environment. Staff allow inmates to be released from their cell and walk /exercise in an enclosed yard devoid of natural air and sunlight. Welfare calls have to be made on behalf of the inmates to their families to let them know of there whereabouts as many transit inmates are transferred to our location from the Sydney Metropolitan region due to bed shortages within the system. Due to the increased number of transit inmates security issues are also created due to the fact that inmates are placed in a cell 3 out. To comply with Department policy and procedures and extra officer has to be called to duty for additional security purposes. **It must be remembered that transit inmates are an additional burden on this location and is a function that we are not normally staffed for in our twenty eight (28) day roster. Our core function is to service the Police and the Courts, not be used as a mini gaol.**

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We are drifting further and further away from our core existence in Police cells, that is to service the Police and free up their resources so more Police are out on the beat. Imagine their horror when we inform them that all the cells are full and cannot receive fresh custody inmates from them. It happens all too often, and the poor officer on duty has to try and explain to the local Duty Officer the reasons for them being placed out into the doghouse for the night. I can assure you that no-one from our senior executive service is on call at three in the morning to explain.

2. At Risk Inmates (RIT):

Most fresh custody inmates that are received from Police are straight off the street and have a high degree of drug and alcohol dependency. Combined with this are a number of mental health issues that fresh custody inmates suffer from. As part of the Department's reception, induction and screening process fresh custody inmates are screened by way of the New Inmate Lodgement and Special Instruction Sheet where inmates participate in an interview with officers upon reception. As a result of this there may be a need for that inmate to be placed on what is called a Mandatory Notification for Risk Intervention Team (RIT). This decision can be made in consultation with the Justice Health Nurse who is employed each day for four (4) hours or with the Court Mental Health Liaison Nurse. Sometimes information about an inmates At Risk status may be conveyed from the Police Custody Management Record, by concerned family members or Legal representative. Officers are trained by way of completing a safe custody course of their obligations to inmates who are at risk and the duty of care that must be afforded to at risk inmates. When an inmate is placed At Risk or as we say RIT this creates overtime. Out of hours an extra officer has to be called to duty for the sole purpose of managing the At Risk inmate. This is done in accordance with Departmental policy and an Industrial Relations directive that the inmate be managed one on one. Unfortunately this creates overtime. Staff are often placed under scrutiny of management because of the overtime issues in relation to this but as far as I'm concerned a life is still worth more than a dollar and cent value, criminal or not.

3. Hospital Escorts:

Of course any illness or injury suffered by an inmate is generally of an urgent nature and cannot be planned for in terms of rostering which creates the need for extra staff to be called in at short notice. At times it is quite difficult to be able to cover this need, but ultimately it is done at a cost to officer's families and private life. Due to the limited number of staff available it is carried out often by staff who reluctantly accept the overtime knowing that they are fulfilling this locations role of providing a duty of care to the inmate. Officers are highly trained in escorting inmates from this location to a less secure environment such as a hospital and in my years at this location we have never had any escapes or breaches of security. This experience cannot be bought and speaks for itself in providing a highly trained public service to the community.

4. Sick Leave:

Any organisation public or private cannot avoid employees using sick leave. At this point in time I think sick leave in the Department can be attributed to the low level of morale that officers are faced with and the uncertainty of their futures. Locations such as this are extremely busy and seem to be becoming increasingly busier with changes to the bail act and transit inmates being held for longer periods in cells. Officers are being burnt out, frustrated at the system and the lack of support shown by management in dealing with staff shortages and overcrowding of Police cells. It leads to a high burn out rate where conflict increases between officers and inmates due to bed shortages and long term transits held in what were primarily designed as holding cells for one (1) night.

Effect of privatisation within the Court Escort Security Unit.

In a 24 hour court location police cells are manned out of court hours. Most of a Correctional Officer's time is spent working alongside fellow Police Officers. Police Officers that I know are very concerned about the possibility of privatisation. They openly state that they do not want private security companies working in their Police Station and are voicing this through the Police Association. The trust and rapport between the Police and Correctional Officers at this location is one which can't be replaced by the introduction of a profit making organisation.

Not only are Police affected, Attorney Generals staff such as Sheriff's Officers, Court Officers have also stated their concern for security once Corrective Services have been removed. They are concerned that inmates may attempt to escape or take over a court area. This may be a real possibility as we know that criminal enterprise is always willing to test out someone new on the block. Staff from the Community Offender Service, Justice Health, Criminal Support Network, Legal Practitioners and not to mention The Judiciary all stand to lose the flexibility, security and safety network that they now experience working alongside Correctional Officers.

As I write this we are losing experienced officers who are frustrated at the uncertainty of their futures for themselves and their families. I can't blame them but I think there will be many more that will follow and this is where the Department will ultimately suffer in the level of experience and ultimately standards will fall to a dangerous level. The community will suffer and the private companies will prosper.

I wish for my name and personal details to be suppressed.