

Submission
No 52

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

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NSW Parliament
Privatisation Enquiry into
Corrective Services

The Director Rachel Stimson
The General Purpose Standing Committee 3
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To: The Privatisation Enquiry in Prisons and Court Escort Security Unit (CESU).

I am writing to you to draw your attention to some key issues I personally have with the privatisation of NSW Correctional Centres and key functions of the Court Escort Security Unit.

I am a Correctional Officer currently based at Parklea Correctional Centre and have been employed with the Department for the last:

The privatisation concerns I have rest on the private operators being able to provide quality services to offenders, and their families when they are at their most vulnerable at the point of incarceration and ultimately having been sent into the unknown, in a monetary generated environment.

We as Correctional Officers under the NSW Corrective Services work under many different policies and procedures two of which I'd like to highlight to the privatisation enquiry are: Duty of Care (to incarcerated offenders) and A Code of Conduct and Ethics (for employees).

Both documents are designed so as that we as Correctional Officers remain professional in performance of all our duties, adhere and contribute to the Mission and Vision of the Department which are: Manage offenders in a safe, secure and humane manner and reduce risks of re-offending and Contributing to a Safer Community through Quality Correctional Services.

I feel so strongly against privatisation of NSW Correctional Centres and CESU that I have spoken to my local minister confidentially outlining my concerns and have heard the government's argument against this which I disagree on that being that the private organisations may be able to provide the same services as we do through being Key Performance Managed.

In a monetary driven environment I am concerned that offenders will not receive the level of care that we currently provide. The employees that work for the organisations will not possess the skill; dedication and knowledge that is required in a dangerous and volatile environment which could also lead to higher levels of corruption within privately run Correctional Centres.

In today's economic climate I would question the means by which security organisations staff the centre, could we see a bouncer from a nightclub on the street kicking out patrons during the night, then find the very same people manning goals and diving prisoners through the city? I believe that this may be a realistic outcome through privatisation, and would like to bring this to the committee's attention.

Rates of assaults in privately run Correctional Centres of both: Offender to Offender and Offender to Staff has been proven to increase and I would not like to see anyone's family either offender or staff members being contacted as a result of the worst case scenario, all to save a few dollars.

Since 1988 the NSW inmate population has grown from 6,000 to over 10,000 in 2008. In that time there have been no commensurate increases in staffing levels in correctional facilities. As a Correctional Officer I find it disturbing that the Government can make changes to sentencing legislation, the detention of juveniles and the Bail Act, which of course will result in a increase in inmate numbers without providing additional resources to the Correctional system.

Existing officer staffing levels at Parklea Correctional Centre have not changed in proportion to the level of inmates since there were 300 offenders and now are currently holding up to 830 offenders. With NSW going through a tougher economic climate, I believe that crime and criminal behaviour will increase which will lead to greater crime and lead to a greater increase in the prison populations throughout the state.

I believe that this has created excessive amounts of overtime payments by not having the required amount of staff at Correctional Centre to fill positions at each locations and having officers work during their days off to keep key areas within the Correctional Centre open and key programs and services to offenders targeted in reducing recidivism.

Programs and Education in NSW Correctional Centres is a vital and integral part of preventing recidivism. An example of this is offering Offenders who have addictions of drugs or alcohol education into the harm of their addiction both physically to themselves and the emotional harm to their families of not being there.

I believe that the most vulnerable offenders are those suffering from mental illness. These offenders currently in NSW Corrective Services are being offered services of Psychiatrists and Psychologists in order to be able to treat their mental illnesses and to have them in a straight frame of mind when returning to the community after incarceration.

Currently in NSW Correctional Centres there are Cultural Days for Offenders where by offenders of particular culture are brought together in a contained environment to help each other get through prison life and to have something to look forward to whilst in gaol. Cultural Days and Religious Services are significant in the fight against depression within Correctional Centres. These services act as guidance towards changing offenders to make them better people.

These services serve as an inaugural foundation into targeting recidivism and changing offender's behaviour for integration into society upon release. The proposed privatisation could see the loss of these services which will lead to greater recidivism.

Only one part of the Department has been contracted out perimeter security and boom gates across Correctional Centres in NSW.

Within the first month, we have seen what may have potentially become a serious incident and an escape of an inmate from lawful detention.

An incident occurred at Silverwater Complex where a former inmate was at the accounts area of the complex. The former inmate was collecting his monies from his former account and become abusive and hostile towards the civilian staff at that location.

The contracted perimeter security officers were reluctant to respond to what may have become a serious incident in which the Immediate Action Response Team at the Maximum Security Metropolitan Reception and Reception Centre, were called upon to leave the centre and respond to the incident.

The Immediate Action Team comprise of about 4 specially trained response staff allocated to Maximum Security Correctional Centres for volatile and dangerous inmates which involve themselves in fighting and other associated criminal and serious offending behaviour, (which includes rioting) within a Correctional environment.

As a Correctional Officer I see it as imperative to myself and my colleagues to have a response staff remain within the Correctional Centre so as to ensure my safety within a Maximum Security Correctional Centre.

I would also like to draw your attention to a recent incident at the privatised boom gate of Long Bay Correctional Complex, which resulted in the escape of a Minimal Security inmate from the centre.

An escape of any nature to me as a NSW Correctional Officer is one of the most serious incidents and most disturbing to hear that should never occur from any Correctional Centre.

The escape of any inmate immediately puts the public in immediate danger of these people and their potential offending behaviour.

I see that the sub contracting of security guards at the Long Bay Boom Gate as a potential factor which has led to this. Correctional Officers may easily distinguish between those who are visitors to the complex and those who are inmates, in which if any Correctional Officer saw an inmate escaping from the centre would do everything within their ability and power to prevent such an act occurring. I would like to question the very dedication of the security contractors within all NSW Correctional Centres.

In relation to this escape the Departmental Response is that they claim that the inmate had scaled a number of fences in a bid to escape. Staffs that know and have managed this inmate see this as next to impossible due to his age and physique. Staff at Long Bay claim that he simply walked passed the security guards. The Department have refused to provide footage of the boom gate during the time of the escape.

I see this as a direct cover up of what really happened, and I'm disgusted that the Shadow minister has to involve ICAC to have the all footage released. I see this as the Department cutting costs irrespective of the consequences to staff, visitors and the general public as a whole.

Junee Correctional Centre is the only other area of the Department that is privatised that I am aware of. The GEO Group which contracts services to the Department is constantly massaged by senior management. Transfer statistics will show you the moment a Junee inmate steps out of line they are transferred to a prison in the public sector, usually Goulburn. The private sector cannot provide programmes, education and services available in the public sector.

My family had a Newsagency based in the South Western Suburbs and ran and owned it for period of 14 years selling it in 2004. During those 14 years I personally experienced crime, from armed hold ups, break and enter's, ram raids and other thefts. I have been threatened for my life for a few lousy dollars by these people at the Newsagency and can see the desperation that an addiction can cause.

I am confident within the NSW Public System that I and my fellow colleagues have a responsibility towards the citizens of NSW to provide Offenders with programs and other means of care to deal with their offending behaviour.

I believe within a privately run Correctional Centre that organisations will utilise the grounds as a rack and stack warehouse to lock them up, in turn upon release will not have addressed their offending behaviour, and could be possible be worse than when initially incarcerated.

I would absolutely hate for this to occur in NSW.

I enclose other negative material which supports my opinion against privatisation.

I ask that you as The Privatisation Enquiry in Prisons and CESU oppose any further Privatisation on my behalf.

On a final note I would like my details to be confidential, as I fear either direct or indirect retributions from my employer for speaking out and any information which I have disclosed to you in this letter to be for enquiry.

Confidential.