

Submission  
No 174

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

**Name:** Mr Timothy Price

**Date received:** 27/02/2009

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Dear Director,

My name is Timothy Price and I have been a Correctional Officer for the last five and a half years. I have spent all this time at Goulburn Correctional Centre. This is the town I was born in and the town I am proud to call home.

To give you some background, I will mention some of the things I have encountered in my short time in the job that make it so demanding (some of this is quite graphic):

- In my first year I was one of the first responding officers to a death in custody (the inmate had committed suicide by way of overdose).
- I was required to respond to a situation where an inmate attempted to assault a magistrate at court.
- I responded to a cell fire in the High Risk Management Unit (known to some as the Supermax). In this particular incident I entered the blazing cell with nothing but smokehood on my head and two fire extinguishers. The fire was so intense that it actually began to melt the hood I was wearing.
- I have witnessed and responded to so many fights that I could not accurately give a number.
- I have responded to stabbings and bashings so severe that the inmates were required to be airlifted to other cities. I can recall witnessing an inmate in such a bad way, that later when I asked about the fluid coming from his skull I was informed that it was brain fluid.
- I have been spat at and had inmates assault me.
- I have had to use force on inmates numerous times to control some of the above situations.
- I have had my finger pricked in a cell search and had to go through six months of uncertainty waiting for blood test results to be returned.

It is not just the physical responses that create such a demanding environment. At times we prison officers witness things we would rather forget. In what other job can you witness adults harming themselves (slashing up, attempted hanging), smearing their bodies in faeces, sliding around in their own urine and making death threats on a regular basis?

I have not pointed out the above situations to gain sympathy, they are the facts. We knew what we were signing up for when we joined and we accept it. Our job is both physically and mentally demanding

I now ask the question, are you happy to task the above situations to a private contractor?

We know that for a private contractor to have an interest in the prison system they must be able to make money from it. This is the whole object of a private company. Now to take a system over and run it for profit will take some changes being made. These changes can have a dramatic impact on not only the staff and inmates in the centre, but the local community as a whole. I will now list the changes that may be made and the reasoning and impact of each change:

- **LOWER STAFF NUMBERS:** To make a profit, these companies would want to run on the bare minimum staffing numbers to avoid costs associated with wages. Lower staff numbers would result in an increase of incidents behind the walls. These incidents would be on both staff and inmates. The inmates that are sent to prison are a crafty bunch, some may say ingenious in certain situations. If there is a weakness the inmates will jump on it and exploit it for all it is worth. Escapes can increase and as such the risk to the community increases.

- **LOWER WAGES:** Again, to assist in profit making, the private operator will pay the worker a lower wage than would be considered the norm for such a job as ours. In fact, workers at Junee Correctional Centre (currently the state's only privately run correctional centre) have previously sought to be paid in line with their public counterparts. The fact that these people are paid a lower wage can lead to an increased risk of corruption. Unfortunately at times history has shown us that desperate people can do desperate things. The lure of perceived easy money by bringing contraband into a correctional centre can be too much. Being paid a lower wage can increase the chances of this kind of scenario. Also, a lower wage can mean that skilled people can be lost to other industries.

- **FEWER PROGRAMS:** Again to make money, these companies can resort to offering fewer services to inmates. This saves them money and therefore increases profit margin.

Unfortunately, this lead to more recidivism. I mentioned at the start of my submission the bad side of our job. In my years in the job I can also identify times when I have seen inmates really achieve something from their time inside. I have witnessed inmates' complete degrees from gaol. I have also witnessed inmates complete numerous courses from a number of program disciplines, including education, drug and alcohol and psychology. To remove or limit access to these services can have a really detrimental affect on the rehabilitative prospects of any inmate. Inmates do require and use these services. It may be no coincidence that Junee has the highest amount of complaints to the Ombudsman in the NSW correctional system.

- **OFFSHORE PROFITS:** There is a major focus in our country for people to buy locally and keep their money in Australia. The majority of private prison operators are based overseas. For our NSW Government to be offering our state's prisons up for tender is disgraceful. As a NSW taxpayer I deplore these actions and ask the question, why would any Government commit to sending Australian dollars overseas?

- **EXAMPLES OVERSEAS:** The committee needs to only look at numerous examples of privately run overseas centers to realize this is the wrong direction for us to be heading. I refer to examples in the US, England and Scotland to name a few. Only recently we saw in the US that judges were being paid off by private prison operators to give inmates longer sentences. This cannot be tolerated and I ask the committee to thoroughly research examples of overseas prisons before making any decision.

The fact that these privately run companies are making a profit from a correctional environment is ludicrous. These companies are effectively making a profit from the suffering of others. To make money from the misery of others is simply morally corrupt. No person with any type of conscience would be able to sleep at night from this. The inmates that have been punished by the courts are sent to prison to try and get their life back on track. Deprivation of liberty is their punishment and to make money from them by denying them a real chance at rehabilitation (I am referring to service cuts) is reprehensible. They are inside as punishment, not for punishment.

At the start of my submission you may have thought, here we have another prison officer against privatization and reform. Yes, I am totally against privatization, but not against reform. Blind Freddy can see that the Department of Corrective Services is in dire need of change. As a taxpayer a budget blowout of forty three million dollars is unacceptable. However, this problem can be fixed without the need for privatization.

I firmly believe that with correct management this problem could have been avoided. Ron Woodham has stated that officers have 'manipulated' rosters. I am sorry to inform the man who is in charge of the correctional system, but officers are unable to 'manipulate' anything without management knowing. Any overtime has to be authorized by local management and approved. I thought the Commissioner would know this. Why has Ron Woodham let this blowout get to such an excessive number? Surely the Department has forecasts and projections and should be in a position to rein things in if they see it to be spiraling out of control.

I now refer to information found on the NSW Parliament website (Hansard) in relation to Mr. Woodham's claims that officers are doing their own roster and thus manipulating overtime. In 1992 Ron Woodham was an Assistant Commissioner. In this same year he addressed all Regional Commanders and Governors on "roster control and unethical practices uncovered". It was discovered that there was a "lack of balance" in some rosters and that perhaps there was also unethical practices as a result. All roster arrangements were reviewed at all institutions. It was discovered that a similar situation as what is claimed to be happening now was occurring. That is a percentage of officers (forty percent) were earning overtime in excess of five thousand dollars. Many were earning in excess of five thousand dollars and some as much as twenty five thousand.

To remedy the above situation, in their words, steps were taken to "radically change rostering procedures". Hansard reads, "Regional Commanders have been given the

responsibility of approving the 28-day rosters before they are actioned, to ensure they are balanced. As a result, a more equitable distribution of available overtime will be achieved".

Now, it is obvious from the above that a problem with overtime is not new to the Department. Ron Woodham himself was near the top of the ranking structure at the time. This was 1992, and here we are seventeen years later, with Ron Woodham as Commissioner and there is still a problem with overtime. It is obvious that the reforms at the time were either never implemented correctly or were the wrong reforms.

The above statements from Hansard directly contradict evidence given by Ron Woodham at the first public hearing. He stated that officers create their own rosters and manipulate rosters to increase overtime opportunities. How can this be the case when it is stated that Regional Commanders are in charge of approving the 28-day roster?

Has Ron Woodham got a short memory, or now that he is at the top is he trying to lay the blame on his officers to deflect attention away from the fact that he has not adequately managed this Department?

It is my belief that the committee should recall Ron Woodham to the bench to answer what are some very serious questions. Why, seventeen years ago was overtime identified as a problem and here we are now in 2009 talking about the same issue with the same management?

Why did Ron Woodham first announce the way forward reforms in 2003 and yet here we are in 2009 and it has still not been implemented?

Ron Woodham has been quick to blame the unions for the situation we are in, but how many times has he been asked by the unions to come to the table to speak and either refused or cancelled?

How can Ron Woodham expect to have the co-operation and respect of his workforce when he constantly blames them for the situation the Department is in, yet he has been a constant figure in the management of the Department since at least 1992?

I firmly believe that privatization is not the answer to the Department's problems. I believe that management needs to be more accountable to the public, and I am talking from the Commissioner down. I also believe that staff should have the opportunity to make legitimate complaints public without the fear of retribution. Currently Departmental policy does not allow officers to make public comment. On the same token, there should be penalties for those officers that may abuse this and make vexatious and vindictive statements.

I call on the committee, regardless of the outcome of this inquiry to recommend a future inquiry into the staff structure and management practices of the Department of Corrective Services from the very top to the very bottom of the Department.

In summary, I totally oppose the privatization of NSW corrections. I oppose this is a currently sworn in officer of the crown and as a NSW taxpayer. I believe that reform is needed in the Department, but privatization is not the answer. Privatization would decrease community and officer safety. It is morally corrupt and would lead to greater recidivism. There are savings to be had in the public system and it should be the job of management to find them. Ron Woodham and his team of managers need to be more accountable for their actions and should be called on to answer some very serious and definitive questions about their management of this Department. The fact that you are not able to manage your staff (by Ron Woodham's own admission in evidence at the first public hearing) is no reason to privatize.

The Minister, Ron Woodham, the board of management of the Department and the staff on the ground need to take control of the Department. They all need to come together to keep this Department in public hands and run it in an efficient manner. This is in the best interests of all staff and the NSW taxpayer.

Thank you for the opportunity to express my concerns to the committee. I would like my submission to be public and not confidential. However, I would appreciate it if my address and phone number were deleted before publication. If the committee so chose, I would relish the opportunity to appear before the committee and speak in person. Thanks again.