

Submission
No 264

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

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially Confidential

Thankyou for giving me the opportunity to write this submission regarding the privatisation of prisons in NSW.

I am a Senior Correctional Officer at Goulburn Correctional Centre and have been employed by the Department for 13 years. Several years ago we heard about the "Way Forward," Commissioner Ron Woodhams prison reform package.

In the beginning the Way Forward package was touted as being a flat rate of overtime across the board, clustered rostering and a rolling let-go and lock-in with Correctional Officers moving around the gaol with the inmates to industries, for example, instead of remaining in a vacant or near vacant wing or unit.

Years passed and after numerous attempts by Correctional Officers through our union to get information on when these reforms were going to take effect, no information was forthcoming from the Department. We were completely left in the dark and out of the loop.

In August 2008 we got an announcement on the Corrective Services Website from the Commissioner Ron Woodham that the Way Forward was being implemented and there would be no negotiation just consultation. Today the Way Forward is: centralised rostering, employment of casual labour, the privatisation of two (maybe more) gaols, and the privatisation of boom gates, court cells and transport. Nothing like the Way Forward several years previous.

Correctional Officers got accused through the media that they "rorted overtime" and belonged to "Pizza Clubs." It was then suggested by Mr Woodham to "have a look at some of the expensive cars/4WD's around Parramatta Gaol" implying that they were owned by Correctional Officers and that they shouldn't be able to afford such things.

I do a very small amount of overtime due to my family situation and I was disgusted by these comments and have had to fend off ridicule and taunts from people who know me that don't work in the Department. I can only speak for myself, but I know more or less every other Officer felt some sort of anger and distress that our own Commissioner could let these slanderous comments be released

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through the media and then agree with them, even though he claims not to use the term "rot."

In regards to the privatisation of services under the control of the Department, I am totally against it. The idea of profiting from crime goes against every moral fibre in me!

Incarcerating someone is the greatest sanction the citizens of this state have as punishment for someone who has been found guilty of committing a crime. That sanction should not be entrusted to an organisation that is, when all is said and done, only concerned with turning a profit for their shareholders.

Private companies take shortcuts to increase profit margins. One example is Correctional Officers employed by the Department receive 12 weeks of primary training, GEO employees only receive 240hrs plus 40 hrs a year (GEO annual report 2007). This fact was mentioned in the annual report because it is more training that is normally given to the private Corrections Officers in the US. The increased hours of training was due to the Australian Standards of public Corrections.

I have concerns with private institutions. What measures are in place to ensure they get the right people for the job? When I applied to the Department of Corrective Services I had to do a police check and sit a 6hr psychological exam. The reasons for my concerns are that if you have a lower paid workforce with the bare basics of training and a recruitment process that may not be as stringent as the Government model, it stands to reason that the risk of corruption is greater.

Even with our Departments selection process and training, mobile phones were smuggled into the HRMU at Goulburn by an officer.

Due to the current stance of one-upmanship of both sides of Government in regards to the "Tough on crime" attitude, the prison population has exploded. Putting people behind bars is popular and a way of getting votes. However there is a down side that a lot of the public don't realise -it has to be paid for!

Once the perpetrators are placed behind the bars they are generally forgotten about by the public and due to the very nature of prisons it is a very closed shop. The only time you hear about prisons in the

media is when someone escapes (to our credit rarely) or there is a serious incident...or if there is something to do with Ivan Milat! That's it.

The major problem we have is that there has not been the spending on the correct programs and infrastructure. In my opinion, if you want less recidivism there has to be more interaction involving all staff Custodial and Programmes staff. This fortunately, or unfortunately, means employing more staff. In saying that, there are some inmates that will not learn and **will** come back many times before they realise that gaol is not a nice place. Unfortunately it can be hit and miss. In the current situation though, it has virtually been "rack 'em and stack 'em." Remand inmates are just housed awaiting further court. There are not a lot of programs offered because they are either not incarcerated for a long time, they get bail or they are sentenced and awaiting their gaol of classification. The increase in remand inmates is often a result of the changing bail laws.

The increase in inmate numbers is playing into the Private Operators hands. Private Prisons in America only came about due to the zero tolerance approach to crime in the 1980's and the subsequent incarceration tidal wave. I am not saying that there should be any tolerance to crime however, unfortunately, there is a price tag.

Wackenhut Corporation was listed on the US stock exchange in 1996 and has boomed ever since.

GEO the current holder of the Junee Correctional Centre contract made a gross profit in 2007 of 1.024 billion (GEO annual report 2007) There are some other interesting statements made in this article. 11% of GEO's prison beds come from 4 Gaols operated in Australia, a total of 2532 beds (790 at Junee). It also states that Australian revenues increased by 15million due to favourable fluctuations in exchange rates contractual adjustments for inflation and improved terms and an **increase of 50 beds in Junee.**

The point I'm trying to make here is that in the current economic climate, should 15 million Australian dollars be sent overseas to save State Governments money.

have run into trouble, and, instead of coming to the frontline officer for suggestions they have decided to ride roughshod over the top of us and blame us and the unions for the mess they are in.

Prison Officers are more than aware of the need for reform and are willing to participate in negotiations as long as their safety is not compromised. We are the ones on the ground trying to reason with the 100 kilo man withdrawing from Ice, who wants to kill 'you and your family. Or covering up the slash wound on a paedophiles throat that has tried to commit suicide, whilst trying to tell him that there is a reason to go on. We are the ones putting a gaol made syringe that was found secreted between an inmates buttocks, in a sharps container without getting pricked, while explaining to the 18 year old that had it how stupid he is and that this sort of thing is just going to ruin his life. (Just some first hand examples).

These are the sort of things Prison Officers deal with on a daily basis. We don't need or want the added stress of being labelled as "rotters" and in the case of the Parklea and Cessnock officers, being told that your gaol is privatised. We don't want to be told "you can either find a new place to work, take a massive pay cut and work for a company that doesn't really care about you" (just their bottom line) or be made redundant. The worst thing is that our own leader is blaming **Prison Officers and the Union** for the problem.

I can't imagine how the Officers, Inmate Services and Programs Staff, Admin Staff and their families at these locations are feeling at present.

I only hope that the decision to privatise these centres, the courts and boom gates is reversed and discussions between the Department, Officers and the Union take place for a better outcome. As I mentioned before, prison officers are well aware of the need of reform.

Here is a simple example I thought of to save at least 7.8 million per year:

Inmates receive around \$15 dollars a week for a tobacco allowance, some inmates don't smoke. If you have 10000 inmates multiplied by 52 that's 7.8 million dollars. Why can't this money be used by the inmate to pay for razors, toothbrushes and soap for example, instead

of being used primarily for the purchase of tobacco products. By having the inmates use this money for the purchase of toiletry items, it has the added bonus of making inmates responsible with their money (a life skill). The current arrangement is that toiletry products like these are supplied free to the inmates.

There is another bonus to this as well. Taxpayers currently pay for the inmates tobacco. Taxpayers also pay for their medical expenses. As we all know the results of smoking cost millions of dollars each year. Why should the taxpayer pay for inmates tobacco AND their medical bills as a result of smoking?

It could also reduce the amount of stand-overs, as tobacco is a valuable commodity. If the inmate needed tobacco he could pay for it using his own money from work or the money sent in from the outside.

I thank you for taking the time to read my submission.