

Testimony in favor of H7739

Private prisons provide less training for workers and pay lower salaries to COs and staff than public prisons do, provide less palatable and nutritious food and fewer programs for prisoners and poorer health care with less highly trained staff than public prisons do, but somehow states on average wind up paying 10% more per prisoner to private prisons and this happens even though private prisons have the right to reject prisoners so the sickest and most violent are in the public system.

Private prison contracts with states usually contain bed quota clauses, guaranteeing that the state will pay a private prison for a certain percentage of beds in the prison every day, even if they are not filled. This leads to public prison beds being left empty - which costs states more - but more importantly, this perverts the criminal justice system, creating incentives for a state to lock up enough people to fill the beds so they don't look like they're overpaying. These occupancy clauses shift priorities away from rehabilitation, counseling and therapy.

With the profits made from these contracts, private prisons spend millions on lobbying state legislators to set longer prison terms for crimes, sending contributions to those that will support harsher sentences. They also fund ALEC, which writes these laws and conducts campaigns to get these laws passed. In some states, private prisons have bought enough votes to slip clauses into state budget bills, completely changing their contracts, negating clauses that limit profits or allowing the number of beds in the prison to be expanded, guaranteeing more profits, often causing overcrowding and the mixing of violent offenders with non-violent ones. So private prisons corrupt the criminal justice system, making it harsher and less safe.

Cost cutting for profits make conditions in private prisons more dangerous and unhealthy and make them less effective at reforming prisoners. Employees are paid less than in public prisons and as a result are less qualified, experienced and competent, creating dangerous and unhealthy situations. Understaffing leads to units going unmonitored. More than a few private prisons have wards run by gangs.

US justice department stats cite 49% more riots and attacks on staff and 65% more incidents of prisoner on prisoner violence in private prisons than in public ones. They offer 68% fewer hours of training. Understaffing and poor training lead to the presence of more drugs and contraband in private prisons. Drug addiction levels in private prisons are double those in public ones. Poorly paid staff have been found to be more likely to participate in the sale and distribution of contraband and drugs.

The food in many private prisons is unpalatable due to lower food budgets and inexperienced kitchen staff. The violence, drug addiction, lack of programs, poor nutrition and health care and untrained staff obviously interfere with any efforts towards rehabilitation. Consequently, recidivism rates for private prisons are higher than those of public prisons which should be of no surprise since the goal of private prisons is profits and filling beds, not rehabilitation or keeping people out of prison.

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Sources:

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3) In the Public Interest : Criminal : How Lockup Quotas and "Low-Crime Taxes" Guarantee

Profits for Private Prison Corporations

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