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Reporting on Prison Privatization and Related Issues

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Wackenhut Juvenile Facility Under Scrutiny

The Wackenhut-operated Jena Juvenile Justice Center in LaSalle Parish, Louisiana has been cited for lax security, insufficient staff training, high employee turnover, allegations of abuse and inadequate medical care since it opened in Dec. 1998.

Louisiana's juvenile justice system is under federal supervision as part of an on-going lawsuit, and prison expert John Whitley, a court-appointed monitor, has issued periodic reports about the Wackenhut-operated juvenile facility. Whitley, formerly a warden at the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola and a former warden for Wackenhut, has criticized almost every aspect of the Jena detention center.

In a Dec. 22, 1998 report written shortly after a near-riot at the facility, Whitley wrote, "This is a typical private prison opening: the majority of the staff unfamiliar with institutions, staff being trained a few weeks before opening, intake going as quickly as possible, with problems and procedures being handled on the go."

The near-riot, which involved 108 of the 144 juveniles then at the facility and resulted in broken windows and destroyed property, occurred on Dec. 19, 1998. Wackenhut officials called in a tactical unit from the company's adult prison in Allen Parish, employees from facilities in Arkansas and Texas, and local sheriff's deputies. The disturbance was quelled with tear gas; two juveniles were taken to a hospital with minor injuries.

Deficiencies noted by Whitley at the Jena detention center have included

poorly trained staff, lax security and inadequate education programs. In the latter regard, he wrote in a May 24 report that "There was very little education taking place. The teachers were sitting in the back of the classroom, while the majority of the offenders were asleep or talking to each other." Jena is staffed with teachers and teacher aides from the LaSalle Parish public school system.

Whitley further noted that vocational education at the facility is almost non-existent due to a lack of classrooms and tools. He said the carpentry, electrician and plumbing classes consist entirely of showing tool-handling safety videos; when the juveniles finish viewing the tapes they watch them again.

In his most recent report of June 7, Whitley recommended a review of staffing levels and a reduction in the number of juveniles housed at the 276-bed facility. The state corrections department, in response to Whitley's report, said it "recognizes that significant problems still exist" at Jena.

State juvenile corrections officers were brought in in June to train Wackenhut employees at Jena. Billy Travis, warden of the Swanson Corr. Center for Youth in Monroe, said his staff's initial evaluation of Jena "looked bad," and that his officers will probably remain at the facility to provide training for several more months. The state will bill Wackenhut for the cost of the training.

Keith Nordyke, an attorney who represents Louisiana inmates in a long-standing federal suit, said allegations of staff-on-juvenile abuse and juvenile-on-

juvenile violence at the Jena facility "are completely unacceptable."

"Jena is another Tallulah," stated David Utter, director of the non-profit Juvenile Justice Project of Louisiana, referring to the Tallulah Corr. Center for Youth. Nordyke agreed: "My impression of Jena is that it is a Tallulah-in-waiting," he said. Conditions at the Tallulah facility, operated by Trans-American Development Associates until last year, were so bad that the state eventually had to take control (*PCINB*, Aug. 1998, pg. 2).

Utter criticized the state's decision to send juveniles to the Wackenhut-run Jena detention center, noting that private prison companies are "going to make money rather than provide services for these kids."

Louisiana pays Wackenhut \$65.82 per juvenile per day, or a total of \$6.63 million a year, to house youths at the Jena facility. "There's no question the state is saving money," said state Corrections Secretary Richard Stadler. "The question is, is it worth it?"

State Rep. Jimmy Long, concerned about negative reports concerning Jena, has sponsored a resolution calling for the state legislative auditor to conduct a comprehensive evaluation comparing state-run and privately-operated adult and juvenile facilities. "I just wanted to be certain that the prisons that are being contracted out are doing the right job," he said. □

Sources: *The Advocate* (LA), July 8, 5, June 13, 1999; *The Times-Picayune*, June 26, 1999.

ADMINISTRIVIA

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WANTED

Articles, clippings and news reports regarding the private corrections industry — please include the source and date of all materials submitted.

CCA Aids Inmates with AIDS

CCA has entered into a cooperative pilot program with Stadtlanders Pharmacy to provide a 30-day supply of medication to prisoners with AIDS/HIV who are released on parole from CCA's Metro Detention Facility in Nashville, Tennessee.

The medication is intended to last parolees until they can enroll in community health care programs. "We feel a moral and ethical obligation to treat people with a fatal disease," said Dr. Chris Fletcher, CCA's managing director of health services.

The initiative, which began last May, was praised by representatives from Nashville CARES, a local AIDS service agency, and the Southern Center for Human Rights. Pittsburgh-based Stadtlanders Pharmacy arranges the free AIDS/HIV medication from pharmaceutical companies, apparently at little or no cost to CCA. Stadtlanders' corrections division is located in Franklin, Tennessee.

Dr. Fletcher said the rate of HIV infection at CCA's 1,200-bed Metro Detention Facility is 5%; nationwide the average rate among inmates is 2%. He said another challenge would be to develop a similar program to provide psychotropic medication to mentally-ill prisoners upon release.

Forty inmates at the Metro Detention Facility have signed up for the AIDS/HIV medication release program. The program has also been implemented at six Indiana facilities, including the CCA-operated Marion County Jail in Indianapolis.

As early as 1994 Dr. Fletcher advised CCA wardens that free medication for HIV-related treatment was available to indigent prisoners. However, in a memo dated Jan. 13, 1994 obtained by *PCINB*, he noted that CCA health service supervisors "were told that the warden would need to authorize any use of this purchasing channel because of potential political ramifications if it became public knowledge in your area that CCA was obtaining free medicine from pharmaceutical companies." At the time Dr. Fletcher was president of Correctional Healthcare Consultants International, Inc. □

Sources: *The Tennessean*, July 26, 1999; Correctional Healthcare Consultants International, Inc. memo.

Hostage Situation at CCA Facility

On June 25, 1999, four Wisconsin prisoners housed at CCA's Whiteville Correctional Facility in Hardeman County, Tennessee took a guard hostage. They reportedly were upset about being transferred to the Tennessee prison far from their families. Neither the officer's name nor the names of the prisoners involved were released.

The inmates surrendered and let the hostage go after a standoff of almost twelve hours; the guard was treated at a local hospital for a puncture wound to his shoulder.

"There were no other injuries, other than the puncture wound, no risk to other staff or the public and everything was under control," said CCA spokesperson Susan Hart. She said the inmates had grabbed the officer as they were leaving a shower area just before the evening count. A SWAT team from Jackson was called in to assist during the incident but no force was used.

Jerry Reeves, a former officer at the Whiteville facility, criticized CCA's security procedures. "I feel like the guards need to have more training. And there should be two guards together at all times. They know that, but they don't push it," he said. "Sometimes guards have no way to contact other guards because there's a shortage of radios."

Reeves was severely injured when inmates beat him with a weight lifting bar in an Aug. 5, 1998 attack at the CCA prison (see *PCINB*, Sept. 1998, pg. 7). □

Sources: *The Jackson Sun*, June 30, 1999; Channel 7 WBBJ News, June 26, 1999.

Other Private Corrections Industry Resources

Corrections and Criminal Justice Coalition (CCJC), Route 2, Box 1144, Harpers Ferry, WV 25425 (888) 315-8784; www.ccjc.com. A consortium of anti-privatization corrections employees' unions.

Corrections USA (CUSA), P.O. Box 394, Newton, NH 03858 (603) 382-9707; www.cusa.org. A professional association of public corrections employees opposed to prison privatization.

Prison Reform Trust, 15 Northburgh Street, 2nd Floor, London, EC1V 0JR England; phone: 011-44-171-251-5070; e-mail: prt@prisonreform.demon.co.uk. Publishes the *Prison Privatisation Report Int'l (PPRI)*, which covers news about the private corrections industry in the U.S. and abroad.

Private Corrections Project, Center for Studies in Criminology and Law, Univ. of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611 (352) 392-1025; web site: web.crim.ufl.edu/pcp. Conducts research into prison privatization. Note that the Project receives funding from the private corrections industry, including Correctional Services Corp., the Bobby Ross Group and Securicor New Century.

Reason Foundation, 3415 S. Sepulveda Blvd. #400, Los Angeles, CA 90034 (310) 391-2245; www.reason.org. A libertarian-oriented think-tank that favors prison privatization. Note that the Foundation has received funds from Securicor, Wackenhut and U.S. Corrections.

CCA Defends Security Following Escape

According to CCA officials, there "was no breakdown" in security procedures when two inmates escaped from the company's West Tennessee Detention Facility in Mason on May 20 (*PCINB*, June 1999, pg. 1).

CCA executives made the security-related statement at a July 8 hearing before the legislative Select Oversight Committee on Corrections. They also said they had adopted a policy of reimbursing "reasonable expenses" incurred by state and local law enforcement agencies due to escapes from CCA prisons. CCA will pay about \$80,000 to reimburse public agencies for the May 20 escape.

Joc Hopper, CCA's regional director for Tennessee and three other states, and Robert Lacy, warden of the Mason prison, attended the committee hearing. Lacy said guards immediately noticed the escape but were recalled when the two inmates fled into the woods so they wouldn't contaminate their tracks.

"There was no problem with the security system" in response to the escape, Lacy said.

Some Tennessee lawmakers expressed concern about the security classification of Montana prisoners held at the CCA facility; one of the escapees had a previous history of escape. State senators Jim Kyle and Robert Rochelle called for legislation to regulate private prisons that house out-of-state inmates (see pg. 4).

CCA regional director Hopper said all of the Montana inmates will be removed from the Mason facility by the end of September. □

Source: *Commercial Appeal* (TN), July 9, 1999.

Disturbance at CCA Prison in OK

In November 1998 CCA opened the Diamondback Correctional Facility in Watonga, Oklahoma and filled it with prisoners from Hawaii and Indiana. According to an inmate housed at the facility there was a great deal of tension between the two groups of prisoners, which led to fights.

CCA reportedly did not attempt to separate the Hawaiian and Indiana prisoners until early June, and then still allowed them to co-mingle at meal times when they were fed in the same dining area.

On June 22 a fight between Indiana and Hawaiian inmates broke out as lunch was being served; the disturbance escalated until it involved dozens of prisoners, and lasted approximately an hour. At least two inmates were injured and guards had to use tear gas to regain control.

Afterwards the facility was placed on lockdown for two weeks; Indiana prisoners involved in the riot were returned to their home state.

Indiana corrections commissioner Ed Cohn downplayed the seriousness of the disturbance but said the incident indicates that Indiana would be better off housing inmates in the state. "Out-of-state is not ideal," he said.

Attempts by CCA and Wackenhut to locate private facilities in Indiana have met with strong community opposition. Wackenhut's efforts to build a 1,400-bed prison have been rebuffed by three counties, while a CCA prison under construction in Shoals is the subject of pending litigation (*PCINB*, June 1999, pg. 7). □

Sources: *Journal and Courier* (IN), undated; correspondence.

RECOMMENDED READING

"A stir over private pens" by Suzanne Smalley, the *National Journal*, May 1, 1999. Contact: National Journal, 1501 M Street NW, Washington, DC 20005 (202) 739-8400.

In the News

PCINB reported last month that the Nevada legislature had nixed Gov. Kenny Guinn's plan to privatize the prison medical system. Guinn had said the proposal would save up to \$3 million. Lawmakers objected to layoffs of more than 300 state employees if the prison medical system was privatized; the state will renew an existing contract with Correctional Medical Services to provide health care at an Ely prison. Source: *The Nevada Appeal*, May 12, 1999.

Polk County, Florida commissioners have exercised a contract option to buy and operate a 1,008-bed jail built by CCA (PCINB, March 1999, pg. 3). An accountant who reviewed Sheriff Lawrence Crow, Jr.'s cost projections determined there would be annual savings of about \$2.8 million if the county runs the jail rather than CCA. Source: *The Ledger (FL)*, June 22, 1999.

CCA has abandoned plans to build a 500-bed detention center in western Iowa. Previously, officials in Shelby County had refused to let CCA locate a facility there following vocal opposition by area residents. Source: *The Des Moines Register*, June 23, 1999.

The privately operated Union City Juvenile Detention Center in Union City, Oklahoma is working to stem a series of escapes. The facility has experienced five escapes since it opened in Feb. 1999 -- more than twice the number from the state's three publicly-run juvenile centers over the same time period. Source: *USA Today*, July 21, 1999.

The Michigan Youth Correctional Facility, the state's first privately-operated prison for juvenile offenders, began receiving its first inmates on July 27. The facility is expected to reach full capacity by November. Source: *USA Today*, July 28, 1999.

U.S. Representative Rips Private Prisons

In a June 13 *Washington Post* editorial, U.S. Rep. Ted Strickland (D-OH) spoke out against a private prison that CCA plans to build in Ward 8 of the District of Columbia. Last March Rep. Strickland introduced a bill to curtail the growth of the private prison industry (PCINB, June 1999, pg. 3).

Strickland, formerly a psychologist at an Ohio correctional facility, noted that "A public prison is obligated to maintain a safe and secure environment for the corrections staff, the inmates and the surrounding community. A private prison, on the other hand, is obligated to its corporate shareholders. The raison d'être of a private prison is profit, not protection."

Rep. Strickland became involved in the private prison debate following high-profile problems at the CCA-operated Northeast Ohio Corr. Center in Youngstown — including stabbings, murders and escapes. He questioned whether private prison operators would be able to handle

large-scale inmate disturbances such as a 1993 riot at a state correctional facility in Lucasville, Ohio.

"When a company seeks to profit from the incarceration of inmates, it must reduce costs," stated Rep. Strickland. "In some cases the profits of investors are boosted by lowered employee salaries, reduced benefits, limited training, risky staff-to-prisoner ratios and sometimes the illegal mixing of maximum-security inmates with those who have committed nonviolent crimes."

Rep. Strickland also cited the potentially corrupting influence of the private prison industry on public policy, observing that companies like CCA had hired lobbyists to influence lawmakers. "It sickens me to think that individuals sit in corporate boardrooms talking about increasing their bottom line when the commodity they are dealing with is captive human lives," he concluded. □

Source: *The Washington Post*, June 13, 1999.

Private Prison Bill Introduced in TN

On July 8, 1999 Tennessee state senator Robert Rochelle introduced legislation to curtail expansion of the private corrections industry. The regulatory bill would prohibit existing private prisons in Tennessee from increasing their capacity and prevent new private prison companies from operating within the state. CCA operates nine facilities in Tennessee.

"Perhaps our goal should be to stop [private prison expansion] now while it is just up to our knees before it devours us all and Tennessee be-

comes a place where any state can dump prisoners they don't want to be responsible for," said Rochelle. His bill was prompted in part by the May 20 escape of two out-of-state inmates from CCA's West Tenn. Detention Facility (PCINB, June 1999, pg. 1).

"There is no good public policy that says you ought to encourage business activity that, by the way it operates, poses a danger to citizens," Rochelle said. □

Source: *The Tennessean*, July 9, 1999.

In the News

Donnell Reed, a wheelchair-bound inmate at the CCA-run Correctional Treatment Facility in Washington, D.C. died last March during an escape attempt. Reed apparently had sawed through bars covering an eighth-story window, then swung himself out on a rope made from knotted bed sheets. He fell to his death when the sheets gave way; an unidentified woman loaded his body into a car and drove him to a local hospital. CCA guards reportedly did not notice anything amiss. Sources: *The Nation*, June 7, 1999; *The Washington Post*, March 15, 1999.

Three youths escaped from the privately operated Victor Cullen Academy, a secure juvenile facility in Frederick County, Maryland, on June 27, 1999. The facility is run by Youth Services Int'l, which was recently acquired by Corr. Services Corp. Department of Juvenile Justice secretary Gilbert de Jesus threatened to cancel the company's contract unless security improvements are made. Source: *Privatization Update*, Jan.-June 1999.

On May 28, 1999, a .38 caliber handgun was reported missing from a perimeter patrol vehicle at the Wackenhut-operated Lea Co. Corr. Facility in Hobbs, New Mexico. Prison officials aren't sure what happened to the firearm. Source: *The Albuquerque Journal*, July 2, 1999.

Wackenhut, which has been trying to build a facility in Indiana, was rebuffed by residents in Muncie and Delaware counties. Jay Co. commissioners say they will support the private prison. Source: *USA Today*, July 19, 1999.

Concerned residents of Marion, Illinois are organizing against a private prison that Wackenhut Corrections has proposed to build near Highway 69. Source: *The Chicago Tribune*, May 28, 1999.

Focus on Cornell Corrections in Santa Fe, NM

On June 2 *The New Mexican* published an overview of Cornell Corrections Inc., which operates an adult jail and juvenile detention center in Santa Fe County. The Houston-based firm is the third largest private prison operator in the U.S., with facilities in 12 states and the District of Columbia.

Cornell announced in March that it will expand its 1,947-bed Big Springs Complex in Big Springs, Texas by 722 beds. The company is currently bidding for a 500-bed state prison contract in Utah.

Cornell's juvenile facilities, including the Santa Fe County detention center, are operated under a corporate division called Abraxas; the company acquired Abraxas, an independent juvenile justice service provider, in 1997.

The New Mexican cited an incident involving negative publicity in Cornell's past. In 1993 the company was operating the Wyatt Detention Facility in Rhode Island. Not able to fill the beds with federal inmates, Cornell brought in 232 prisoners from North Carolina, including 18 convicted murderers — despite an understanding that no violent inmates would be housed at the prison.

Regarding the company's New

Mexico operations, in March 1997 Cornell won a \$23.3 million contract to build and manage a new Santa Fe County jail and to turn the existing jail into a juvenile facility. The jail's design contract was awarded to a firm that employed former Santa Fe mayor Art Trujillo; a \$100,000 construction contract went to a company owned by county commissioner Javier Gonzales' brother-in-law.

A contract between Cornell and Santa Fe County was neglected until just before the jail was due to open in summer 1998. County and company officials were unable to agree on the terms of the contract, including how much the county would have to pay Cornell, and the county commission put the contract out to bid.

Cornell won the contract after Wackenhut, its competitor, unexpectedly withdrew. Cornell agreed to pay startup costs for the jail and to house 275 county inmates during the first fiscal year of operations, which ends in July 1999. After that time the county will pay \$60 per day for each inmate above the contractual limit, which drops to 225 in July and 200 in fiscal year 2001. □

Source: *The New Mexican*, June 2, 1999.

Judge Requests Investigation of Cornell Jail

New Mexico judge Michael Vigil has asked the Santa Fe County Sheriff's Department to investigate the Cornell-operated Santa Fe County jail and to submit a report on recent problems at the facility.

Judge Vigil said he was concerned about rape charges brought against Cornell guards in two separate incidents and about the company's practice, re-

cently discontinued, of hiring convicted felons to oversee juvenile offenders (see *PCINB*, May 1999, pg. 4).

The judge also noted that on more than one occasion the jail had released inmates who were not supposed to be released. □

Source: *The New Mexican*, June 2, 1999.