

Gretchen Quarterman
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Hon. Jack Kingston
Member of Congress
First District of Georgia

Dear Mr. Kingston,

You asked me last week in Tifton to provide you with evidence that private prisons have fewer guards per prisoner than public prisons.

Here is an example:

"The largest juvenile prison in the nation, Walnut Grove Youth Correctional Facility houses 1,200 boys and young men, between the ages of 13 and 22, and is run by a private contractor, the GEO Group based in Boca Raton, FL. ... State audits over the last several years had already indicated the burgeoning problem. While it is recommended at youth facilities to have an inmate-to-guard ratio of 10:1 or 12:1, Walnut Grove had a ratio of 60:1."

"When the Wolves Guard the Sheep," by Mariah Adin in Kids and Crime, 28 March 2011

<http://www.kidsandcrime.com/?p=56>

It's not just less staff, it's less qualified staff:

"The difficulties at Jena were attributed primarily to staffing deficiencies: a lack of stable leadership, high turnover, excessive overtime, and inadequate training. These faults are common in private corrections, with staff turnover running almost three times higher, on average, than at public correctional facilities.

"While performance problems of such severe magnitude are not yet common in the private prison industry, violent incidents are not isolated to a few facilities. A recent survey of private prisons by James Austin compared the rates of major incidents in private and public prisons of comparable security levels and found that private prisons had fifty percent more inmate-on-staff assaults and two-thirds more inmate-on-inmate assaults. These ominous signs are fueling a mounting perception that in pursuit of profits, private prison managers are heedless of the essential requirements necessary for delivery of safe and humane correctional services."

"Prison Privatization: Recent Developments in The United States" by Judith Greene, A Paper Presented at the International Conference on Penal Abolition: May 12, 2000.

http://archive.epinet.org/real_media/010111/materials/greene2.pdf

Fewer and less qualified staff produce problems of violence, such as the incident the FBI is investigating in Boise, Idaho at the so-called Gladiator School.

"Video release prompts FBI prison investigation: Critics claim the privately run Idaho Correctional Center uses inmate-on-inmate violence", by Rebecca Boone for AP, 30 November 2010

http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/40439227/ns/us_news-crime_and_courts/#.Tle1wvRWP1U

Private prisons in Pennsylvania have been involved in a "kids for cash" scheme in which a judge was recently sentenced to 28 years for locking up youths for money.

"Pa. judge gets 28 years in 'kids for cash' case", Associated Press, 12 August 2011

<http://valdostadailytimes.com/todays-top-stories/x1533027233/>

Pa-judge-gets-28-years-in-kids-for-cash-case

More comprehensive evidence is difficult to obtain, because, according to the American Correctional Officer Intelligence Network,

"In 1998 the private prison industry stopped providing information on assaults, escapes, inmate population, inmate classification, staffing ratio's, turnover rates, training statistics and virtually all information that would allow the public to make an informed choice regarding the privatization of our correctional facilities."

In 2007, H.R. 1889, the Private Prison Information Act, got as far as the House Judiciary Committee, where it died.

<http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bill.xpd?bill=h110-1889>

As a member of Congress, I suggest that you reintroduce that or another bill

"To require prisons and other correctional facilities holding Federal prisoners under a contract with the Federal Government to make the same information available to the public that Federal prisons and correctional facilities are required to do by law."

Then you won't have to depend on constituents to ferret out that information for you, and we'll all know what our tax dollars are being spent on. And we would know if savings with private prisons were genuine.

Sincerely,

Gretchen Quarterman