

Feb 20, 2014 PCWG watch Industry: Report: Secrecy prevails

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New Report Calls for More Disclosure from Private Prison Profiteers

Salem-News.com

The report also highlighted the extent to which companies running private prisons sought to influence legislation and regulation during the 2012 election cycle

Prisoner

(WASHINGTON, DC) - Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW) today released, "Private Prisons: A Bastion of Secrecy," a report calling for increased transparency by authorizing public access to documents that would shed light on private prison operations and their costs, and might reveal the extent to which they deprive prisoners of basic civil liberties.

Federal and state prisons are subject to open records laws, but private prisons, which held 18 percent of the federal prison population in 2012, are currently immune from the same disclosure requirements.

Full report here: http://www.citizensforethics.org/page/-/PDFs/Reports/CREW_Private_Prisons_FOIA_secrecy_report_02_18_2014.pdf?nocdn=1

CREW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MELANIE SLOAN SAID, "IT MAKES NO SENSE TO EXEMPT PRIVATE PRISONS FROM THE SAME TRANSPARENCY REQUIREMENTS ALREADY APPLIED TO GOVERNMENT-RUN STATE AND FEDERAL PRISONS. HIGHLY PROFITABLE PRIVATE PRISON COMPANIES LIKE CORRECTIONS CORPORATION OF AMERICA (CCA) AND THE GEO GROUP HAVE QUITE A DEAL: THEY RAKE IN TAXPAYER DOLLARS WITHOUT SUFFERING TAXPAYER SCRUTINY. A LITTLE TRANSPARENCY WOULD GO A LONG WAY TOWARD EXPOSING THE FREQUENTLY DEPLORABLE CONDITIONS OF PRIVATE PRISONS."

The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), which applies to all government agencies including the Bureau of Prisons, was enacted before many essential government functions were regularly outsourced to private entities. As a result, the drafters did not anticipate a need to apply the FOIA to government contractors. CCA and GEO Group are the two largest private prison contractors, with combined annual revenue of \$2.9 billion in 2010.

CCA's and GEO Group's records clearly show the need for increased transparency provided by the FOIA:

An Idaho lawsuit against CCA reveals the company admitted to falsifying almost 4,800 hours of staffing records during a seven-month period.

In a separate Idaho lawsuit, inmates claimed CCA falsified staff logs to hide chronic understaffing.

The Department of Justice recently found that juveniles imprisoned in a Mississippi GEO Group facility were regularly and repeatedly beaten by staff, but the abuse was never reported to authorities as required by law.

CREW's report also highlighted the extent to which companies running private prisons sought to influence legislation and regulation during the 2012 election cycle:

Political action committee (PAC) contributions: CCA's PAC contributed more than \$130,000 to congressional candidates; GEO Group's PAC contributed more than \$60,000.

Broader influence: CCA, its PAC, its employees and their families contributed more than \$1.1 million to candidates, leadership PACs, parties, and so-called 527 committees. GEO Group, its PAC, employees, and their families contributed more than \$400,000.

"These companies operate almost completely outside of the public eye while donating hundreds of thousands of dollars to elected officials. It seems members of Congress are well paid to look the other way while the politically powerless – children, undocumented immigrants, and poor and uneducated inmates -- are subjected to conditions that are often inhumane." Ms. Sloan said.

Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW) is a non-profit legal watchdog group dedicated to holding public officials accountable for their actions. For more information, please visit www.citizensforethics.org or contact Derrick Crowe at 202.408.5565 or dcrowe@citizensforethics.org.