



ALASKA CORRECTIONAL OFFICERS ASSOCIATION

"Walking Alaska's toughest beat."

October 17, 2019

Governor Dunleavy,

When we met, you asked for my thoughts and concerns regarding your intent to send Alaskans to out-of-state private prisons prior to utilizing the available capacity at Palmer Correctional Center. As a Correctional Officer for 22 years, my thoughts on this subject are straightforward - please do not do this. This decision would undermine your public safety goals. Sending inmates out-of-state will break up families, increase recidivism, and endanger Alaskans. When inmates were previously held outside of Alaska, they brought gangs and violence back with them. If you are being informed otherwise, I welcome the opportunity to meet with you or any member of your staff to explain the realities of private prisons.

Below are just a few of the many reasons why Palmer Correctional Center and APSC certified professional Alaska Correctional Officers should be utilized prior to the State spending millions of dollars to incarcerate Alaskans in out-of-state private prisons.

- When inmates warehoused in private prisons returned to Alaska, it resulted in more crime and Alaska victims. Three of Alaska's worst gangs were created when inmates were housed out of state: Low Life's, Native Brotherhood, and 1488s. Lower 48 private prisons created these gangs, but they are Alaska's problem now, increasing the danger to staff, other inmates, and the public.
- Between 2000 and 2016 the following states ended their contracts with private prisons; Arkansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Michigan, Nevada, North Dakota, Utah, and Wisconsin.¹ Iowa, Illinois, California and New York, and the local governments of Pima County, King County, the City of Tucson, and the city of Denver have all banned the use of private prisons in their jurisdictions, likewise the country of Israel.
- In 2018, President Donald Trump signed a bipartisan criminal justice bill that requires federal prisoners be incarcerated no more than 500 miles from their primary residence.² Alaskans incarcerated in out-of-state private prisons will suffer elimination of most, if not all, of the visits from individuals in their support system.
- On multiple occasions, Alaskans have voted against the use of private prisons.
- Private prisons cut corners and shift costs to the State to increase their profits. They run contrary to Law Enforcement's mission to protect and serve the public.

¹ Capitalizing-on-Mass-Incarceration (2018), Page 5, www.sentencingproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Capitalizing-on-Mass-Incarceration.pdf

² www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/5682/text

- Contact with community support systems is crucial to reducing recidivism. A study of 7,000 people released from Florida prisons found that those receiving visitors were 31 percent less likely to commit another crime than those who did not.³
- Simply put, private prisons create better criminals, who consequently commit more crimes and create more victims in Alaska communities. A study by the Minnesota Department of Corrections found that compared to prisoners released from state correctional facilities, prisoners incarcerated in private prisons were 13 percent more likely to be arrested again, and 22 percent more likely to be convicted again.⁴ An Oklahoma study similarly found that imprisonment in a private prison increased the likelihood a person would commit another crime after release by up to 16.7 percent.⁵
- Alaska’s current programming efforts have a positive impact on recidivism and are saving the State money. Prior to its close, Palmer Correctional Center had some of the best programming in the State. In 2017, the Alaska Justice Information Center conducted an Adult Criminal Justice Program Benefit Cost Analysis which found, “Overall, Alaska offers adult criminal justice programs with impressive recidivism reduction effects.”
- Alaska has already fallen victim to corruption by private prisons and their lobbyists resulting in a federal investigation, multiple convictions, and one Alaska Legislator serving time in prison.

Alaska Public Media interviewed an Alaskan who was incarcerated in a private prison for six years and who said he started the “Low Life” gang. Below is a quote from that interview,

You know you start learning criminal ways out there. You start... it’s kinda lawless. The staff members don’t get paid enough, you know.... They’re pretty much minimum wage so they’re easy to talk into bringing the dope sack... To put us all out of state was not smart.... We came back seasoned criminals. We came back heroin junkies. We came back with Hepatitis.⁶

The former director of a faith-based home for women in Juneau described the conditions of private prisons Alaskans were formerly held in as “horrendous.” She stated,

It’s big business, and it’s unfortunate that people are making money off the backs of socially, economically challenged, marginalized communities.... Especially in Alaska, when we have so many rural areas, we’re already at a disadvantage when

³ In the Public Interest, “How Private Prison Companies Increase Recidivism,” research brief, June 2016, Page 6, www.inthepublicinterest.org/wp-content/uploads/ITPI-Recidivism-ResearchBrief-June2016.pdf

⁴ “The results showed that offenders who had been incarcerated in a private prison had a greater hazard of recidivism in all 20 models, and the recidivism risk was significantly greater in eight of the models.” Duwe & Clark, “The Effects of Private Prison Confinement in Minnesota on Offender Recidivism,” Minnesota Department of Corrections, Page 28, www.privateci.org/reports_files/MNPrivatePrisonEvaluation_WebsiteFinal.pdf

⁵ Andrew L. Spivak and Susan F. Sharp, “Inmate Recidivism as a Measure of Private Prison Performance,” Crime and Delinquency 54, no. 3 (July 2008): 482-508.

⁶ 2019-02-13 - Alaska Public Media - Among Dunleavy’s proposed DOC cuts, sending 500 prisoners out of state, www.alaskapublic.org/2019/02/13/among-dunleavys-proposed-doc-cuts-sending-500-prisoners-out-of-state/

*they have to go to prison in our larger communities, let alone taking them out of state.*⁷

In 2006, when the Alaska State Legislature passed Senate Bill 65, which built the Goose Creek Correctional Center and stopped the use of out-of-state private prisons, it did so because it made more financial sense, reduced recidivism, and was safer for Alaskans. At the time, Governor Frank Murkowski stated;

*I have consistently supported finding a solution to the chronic problem of prison overcrowding in Alaska. Over a decade of gridlock has led to the failure to improve on what was supposed to be a temporary solution of sending prisoners to Arizona. The result has been the placement of more and more prisoners into community housing alternatives and the constant transferring of prisoners between locations to ensure the integrity of the system, all of which runs the risk of compromising the level of public safety being provided to Alaskans.... And finally, this bill will generate good paying, long-term jobs for Alaskans and end the export of over \$14 million per year to Arizona....*⁸

I am encouraged by your commitment in our meeting to prioritize hiring 85 additional Correctional Officers. These Officers could help bring Palmer Correctional Center online. Palmer Correctional Center does not need to immediately open in full; however, the Legislature already has designated funds for it to be opened⁹ and a ramped-up approach to opening it could take place in less than 12 months.

Sir, I cannot tell you in strong enough terms that your Administration's inaction over the past months in regard to hiring Correctional Officers and your decision to utilize private prisons runs counter to your public safety agenda. Sending Alaskan prisoners to lower 48 private prisons places all Alaskans at greater risk.

Please, do not move forward with this action.



Randy McLellan
President, Alaska Correctional Officers Association

⁷ 2019-02-15 - Juneau Empire - State examining sending inmates out of state (again) to save money, www.juneauempire.com/news/state-examining-sending-inmates-out-of-state-again-to-save-money/

⁸ 2004-09-07 Alaska Legislature Senate Journal for SB 65 in the 23rd Legislature, Page 3924-3925, www.akleg.gov/pdf/23/J/S2004-09-07.PDF

⁹ https://omb.alaska.gov/ombfiles/20_budget/DOC/Enacted/20compdetail_doc.pdf, Page 24