

Autumn Fest

Learning Tree Farm 2011

Saturday, September 24
9 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Free Admission

- Run • 9 a.m.** Family Fun Run through the fields and over hay bales!
- Breakfast • 9-10:30 a.m.** Brubaker's Healthy Pancake Breakfast!
- Cow Pie Plop • 1-3 p.m.** Buy a Plot...Guaranteed Winners!

Join us for Fun on the Farm!

ENJOY...Pony Rides, Music, Food and Beverages for Purchase, Face Painting, Birds of Prey show, Ice Cream, Popcorn, Hayrides, Guided Hikes in the Woods, Farm Programs and Games, Tours of the Barn, Animals and Garden, Old-fashioned Demonstrations, Bake Sale, Gift Shop and more!



Learning Tree Farm
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forum left

Is it sound public policy to privatize parts of the Ohio correctional system, including the recent sale of the Lake Erie Correctional Institution to a private company?

For-profit prisons: More inmates = more \$\$

By RANA ODEH

In June 2011, Governor Kasich signed a sentencing reform bill that will favor rehab over prison for non-violent offenders, and will allow inmates convicted of non-violent crimes to get out early. This reform would greatly reduce the number of inmates in Ohio's prison system and therefore would lead to a significant saving for Ohio's taxpayers. Unfortunately, this month Kasich moved to privatize Ohio's Lake Erie Correctional Institution, set to be finalized in January unless ProgressOhio wins its lawsuit to block the sale to the Corrections Corporation of America (CCA).

Privatizing state prisons will completely offset the goal of Kasich's sentencing reform bill for one main reason: for-profit prisons must generate revenues for their shareholders. As a result, they have a direct goal of ensuring that Ohio's prison system stays full. The more inmates the prison holds, the more profit CCA will earn. Private prisons also have a high incentive to cut corners in order to cut spending on labor, training, food, health care, rehabilitation programs, etc. Since privatizing prisons removes responsibility from the state's elected representatives, it makes it more difficult for the facilities to

prisons, according to the ACLU. Taxpayers end up paying more for the longer duration of inmates than they would with a reform that supported rehabilitation and shorter sentencing for non-violent crimes. According to the ACLU, of the top five states in percentage of privatized prison beds, each has a higher three-year recidivism rate than Ohio.

As of October 2009, Ohio taxpayers spent an average of \$25,254 per year for each inmate housed in Ohio prisons. In June 2009, the Ohio prison system held a total of 51,113 inmates, and the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (ODRC) projects that the number will grow to 52,546 in 2011.

Ohio's taxpayers will end up paying more in taxes while CCA continues to reap its profits — a reported \$1.675 billion in 2010. Despite its high profit earnings, the IRS sued CCA in 2002 after its audit of the company suggested it was abusing tax loopholes to avoid paying its share of federal taxes. CCA settled with the IRS in 2002, agreeing to pay \$54 million in back taxes.

According to the ACLU, many states have recently begun ending their contractual relationships with private prison operators, concluding that the costs and risks for privatiza-

“It is a vicious cycle of confining more people for a longer period of time with high chances of reincarceration.”

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be held accountable by the public, and the public has far less oversight of the operation of private prisons. In many states, private prisons are exempt from public record laws. Private prison operators control their labor costs by reducing the number of staff, hiring low-wage, non-union labor and eliminating fringe benefits at their discretion.

Cutting corners came at a price in Youngstown in the '90s. According to a *Mother Jones Magazine* article, upon opening the facility in 1997, CCA staffed it "with guards who had little or no experience in corrections — and then imported 1,700 of the most violent inmates from Washington, D.C. to fill what was supposed to be a medium security prison." In its first 14 months of operation, the facility experienced 20 stabbings, two murders and six escapes. In 1998, the City of Youngstown sued CCA on behalf of the inmates at the prison, alleging that prisoners "were put at risk by being sheltered with maximum-security prisoners in a facility not designed for containing them." The court ordered the 113 "reclassified" maximum-security inmates be removed from the prison. The litigation cost of reclassifying inmates and changes in security procedures posed extra costs to the state.

What the Youngstown incident shows is that even where a private prison demonstrates short-term cost savings, it only takes one major disturbance to cost more than the expected savings of the prison.

Besides cutting costs on training and labor, for-profit prisons ensure a high recidivism rate by cutting costs of rehabilitation programs. It is a vicious cycle of confining more people for a longer period of time with high chances of reincarceration. In purely financial terms — without giving any weight to the social harm caused by increased recidivism — the additional costs of increased future confinement alone exceed any short-term savings offered by private

tion far outweigh any short-term benefits.

In 2001, the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Statistics published a comprehensive survey of cost comparison studies and concluded that private prisons offered only modest cost savings. The survey concluded that the average savings from privatization was only about one percent, which came at the price of higher assaults due to understaffing or a lack of experienced staff. Beside the fact that private prisons do not save taxpayers money, they are also a breeding ground for corruption.

The privatization of prisons resulted in the recently uncovered scandal of former Luzerne County Juvenile Court Judge Mark Ciavarella's "kids for cash" scheme in which he accepted nearly \$1 million from a developer who built the local detention facility, to maximize the sentencing of more juveniles to the for-profit facility, according to an article published by Reuters. In the long run, the privatization of prisons is not saving the state or taxpayers any money, it leaves room for more corruption, lowers safety and health standards for inmates and employees, and guarantees a prison that is always populated to full capacity, which is not to say the community enjoys increased safety. Let's hope that ProgressOhio wins this case and that we see an end to for-profit prisons.



Rana Odeh is a graduate of the University of Dayton with a degree in English and Philosophy. Her research and writings focus on issues of race, class and gender. She can be reached at RanaOdeh@DaytonCityPaper.com.