

# Privatization Issues In The News

## 60% of Floridians against private prisons

The Florida Department of Corrections recently released the results of a public survey of people's knowledge of state prisons and corrections (see the article from *The Gainesville Sun* below). The Department wanted to "identify areas in which public awareness and education may be needed and the Florida Legislature might want to emphasize."

Besides identifying that over half the public underestimated the number of inmates in prison and the percentage of sentences they must serve, 60 percent of those surveyed opposed private companies running state prisons.

The Florida PBA has been telling the Legislature for years that private prisons are wrong. Now it appears that the public agrees with our sentiment. ●



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### The Gainesville Sun

#### Survey: Many Floridians underestimate inmate population

By KAREN VOYLES—Sun staff writer  
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TALLAHASSEE - More than half of the adults questioned earlier this year underestimated the number of people in state prisons and the percentage of sentences inmates must serve.

However, more than half rated the Department of Corrections as doing a good or excellent job of preventing escapes.

The \$28,000 survey was requested about a year ago by the administration of former DOC Secretary James Crosby. Prison officials asked Florida State University researchers to conduct the survey to help the prison system "identify areas in which public awareness and education may be needed and areas that the Department and the Florida Legislature might want to emphasize."

About 40 percent of the 1,308 Floridians interviewed were polled while Crosby was still running the department. The other 60 percent were interviewed after Crosby was fired for taking kickbacks and James McDonough was hired to take over the agency.

"This wasn't about Mr. Crosby's popularity," said Dan Mears, the FSU professor of criminology who directed the survey. "But, one of the things we explored was whether the sudden shift in administration affected public opinion."

Researchers found no measurable difference in responses before or after Crosby was fired.

"There could be lots of reasons for that," Mears said. "One is that the public looks at what is going on in prisons and cares, but something like this doesn't register that much. Or, they may not view the firing as indicative of the entire agency or there may be other reasons why there wasn't much difference in the responses we got before and after (the firing)."

Part of the survey examined how much factual information Floridians had about state prisons. The answers showed few knew much at all.

Only 16.8 percent of those asked could correctly estimate the number of state inmates and only 20 percent knew how much time new inmates are required to serve in prison.

Mears said he was not surprised at how far off the public's estimate was.

"General policymakers and the public abysmally don't know - don't have the foggiest idea about prisons," Mears said.

The survey also asked whether the department was doing a good job. The highest mark was for preventing escapes—56 percent ranked the department as doing a good or excellent job—but lowest for rehabilitating inmates. Only 15 percent ranked the department as doing a good or excellent job of rehabilitation.

Apparently the department's public image overall has improved from 1998 when a similar survey was conducted. The 1998 poll found only 25 percent of those surveyed ranked the department as doing an excellent or good job.

The third area of the 2006 survey concerned the department's priorities and policies. A vast majority of those polled - about 85 percent - said the department's priorities should be punishing, deterring and rehabilitating inmates. Sixty percent opposed private companies running state prisons—a few state prisons are currently run by private companies—and 73 percent favored allowing inmates to vote after completing their sentences, a process that is not automatic in Florida and can be convoluted for former felons.

Researchers attached price tags to some policies and found that those polled would be willing to use \$150 million or more in tax money to support policies such as: counseling to inmates' children, drug treatment, psychiatric care, transitional services for released inmates, building new prisons and hiring more correctional officers.

After reviewing the survey results, McDonough noted that the Crosby administration had approved the study last

fall, but, "I think they were a little bit late on doing this one."

Crosby and his protégé, Allen Clark, are scheduled to be sentenced in federal court in late October for their parts in a kickback scheme while running the state prison system.

Clark resigned more than a year ago and Crosby was fired by Gov. Jeb Bush in February after the governor was told about the kickback scheme.

The agency's operation under Crosby came under intense federal and state scrutiny because of allegations of cronyism, nepotism and a promotion and hiring system that centered on outside attributes, such as having a high batting average and being willing to play on prison softball teams.

Several former officers were prosecuted in federal court for their involvement in a steroid ring and other former officers are being prosecuted for grand theft or accepting unauthorized compensation.

McDonough said his plans for the survey were to add it to the other information streams already available to him about the agency he took over in February.

"These results stand with other things this department has done such as our internal evaluation," McDonough said. "I am looking at what the department is all about all the time. This study stands with many others. I also listen and read and constantly evaluate the information from internal and external sources."

Mears said his hope is that survey results will be used by prison and other public officials.

"What I take from this survey is that even when the public is supporting get-tough measures, they are also supportive of activities to help people fare better when they get out. It's like the public is conservative and liberal at the same time."

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#### Webpage

The Private Corrections Institute maintains an excellent webpage on the for-profit private prison industry. You can get recent news, lawsuits, reports, and links to other sites. Our "Hall of Shame" is a hit among activists.

The link is:

[www.PrivateCI.org](http://www.PrivateCI.org)

#### Get aboard the PCI-Watch

If you are serious about fighting the for-profit private prison industry, then you need to sign-up for the PCI's Watch — the electronic private prison news service. Just send your request to [kenk@PrivateCI.org](mailto:kenk@PrivateCI.org) and ask to be put on the list. Please be aware — this is not for the faint-at-heart. Sometimes there is a lot of reading but it is well worth it.



## Lieberman Advocates Bill to Increase Transparency at Private Prisons

Submitted by State Correctional Officers Chapter President Jim Baiardi

WASHINGTON - Senator Joe Lieberman, D-Conn., has introduced the Private Prison Information Act, S. 4031, a bill that would impose reporting obligations similar to those of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) on private prisons contracting with federal agencies.

"As the federal government increasingly turns to private, for-profit companies to incarcerate federal prisoners, we must ensure that information about the operation of private prisons and detention facilities is readily available. This legislation will lift the veil of secrecy surrounding private facilities and will hold them accountable to the public," Lieberman said.

Approximately 25,000 federal criminal prisoners are jailed in private facilities at any given time, and more than 20% of the 200,000 immigrants and asylum seekers detained annually by Immigration and Customs Enforcement are held in 33 private detention centers.

Studies by criminal justice groups have shown that correctional officers at privately run prisons are paid less well, receive less training, and experience higher turnover rates than those at prisons run by government agencies. This can lead to greater rates of assaults on staff, inmate on inmate assaults, and escape attempts. Immigration advocates report that private immigration detention facilities

rely on psychotropic medication as a management tool for their non-criminal population. The Private Prison Information Act would help prevent abuse and unlawful conduct at private prisons by requiring public disclosure of information about the operation of these facilities.

The bill, which was introduced Friday, was endorsed by associations and unions representing law enforcement and correctional officers, including the Connecticut Correctional Employees Union, the California Correctional Peace Officers Association, the Florida Police Benevolent Association, the Pennsylvania State Correctional Officers Association, and the Association for Los Angeles Deputy Sheriffs. The bill also has the support of more than two dozen human rights, immigrant, and legal justice groups, including: Asian American Justice Center, Center for Constitutional Rights, Church World Service Immigration and Refugee Program, Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs, Immigrant Legal Resource Center, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, National Immigrant Justice Center, National Immigration Law Center, Physicians for Human Rights, U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, and Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children. The bill is also supported by government employee unions, including AFGE and AFSCME.