

# Privatization Issues In The News

## Sheriff To Take Over Infamous CCA Jail

After over 20 years of running the Bay County Jail, Corrections Corporation of America (CCA) is leaving due to under-bidding the costs associated with staffing a new jail and a long history of mismanagement by CCA.

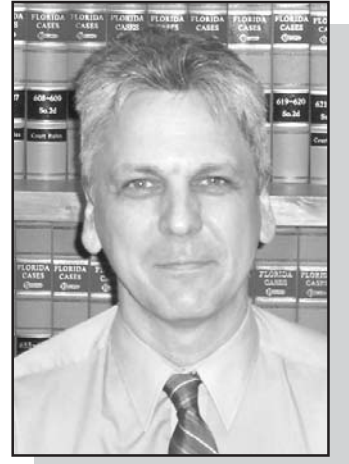
The Bay County Jail was privatized in 1985 and was CCA's first jail in Florida. But as time progressed and more and more incidents occurred, the county commission could no longer ignore CCA's mismanagement.

For example: In 2002, inmate **Chad Littles** was beaten to death by six other inmates at the jail and **Justin Sturgis** died of a drug overdose. In 2003, ethics complaints were filed by the Florida PBA against three former Bay County commissioners, a former county manager, a former county attorney and the county's chief of emergency services for a trip they took paid for by CCA. In 2004, a hostage situation erupted that eventually led to the accidental shooting of a CCA nurse. In 2005, inmate **James Sly** hung himself in the shower while a CCA headcount listed him in his cell, a male

nurse was caught having sex with an female inmate on the examination table, a convicted murderer was caught with hacksaw blades within days of escaping and CCA competitor, Emerald Corrections, challenged the bidding process for building and operating a new jail. The lists goes on and on. (Go to <http://privateci.org/florida.htm> and then search for "Bay County Jail" for the whole history of CCA's mismanagement.)

The final straw came in May of this year when CCA notified the County that they could not operate the jail under the terms of the contract worked out for the new jail: "Spokeswoman **Louise Grant** said the Tennessee-based company could not continue to pay the competitive wages needed to 'retain the brightest and the best staff.'"

In a "déjà vu" all over again, a CCA nurse refused to put herself into a threatening situation similar to the one she experienced in the 2004 hostage situation. The editorial below summarizes the feelings about CCA in Bay County. ●



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## THE NEWS HERALD

September 21, 2008 *News-Herald*

The reaction this week to jail nurse **Kathy Baucum's** fear of being placed—with a cart full of medications—with dozens of inmates and one guard tells you what you need to know about a corporate-run jail versus a locally operated one. Baucum was one of the hostages held by inmates at the Corrections Corporation of America-run downtown jail in 2004. It was a 12-hour standoff with inmates who got access to pharmaceuticals and took nurses hostage and ended in gunfire and one nurse getting shot. Part of the fault in that case was the method used for distributing the medicines and locks.

A new system was put in place, one that left Baucum and other nurses feeling safer. About a week ago, it changed again, and the nurses were told to enter a cell pod—where between 50 and 120 inmates are housed—with one guard between the inmates, the nurse and the medications. Baucum refused. She says she was fired, that they took her CCA identification card and told her not to return. **Warden Joe Ponte** says she wasn't fired, that he was willing to discuss it. More telling, he had this to say about her concerns: The job, like any others, has its dangers and the nurses know of those ahead of time. It's how some other jails do it. That was a one-time incident. That while the new jail is set up for nurses to hand out meds via a safe station, it needlessly blocks hallways for too long.

That means nothing to Baucum, who was at the mercy of inmates not that long ago. "No one knows it until they lived it," she said. "If it can happen once, it can happen again." **Bay County Sheriff Frank McKeithen** lived it. He

negotiated with the inmates who held Baucum for 12 hours. He and his men secured the release of one hostage for pizza, and another for a cell phone. They heard the call from one kidnapper to a girlfriend, essentially saying he didn't plan to live through the night. "You had to see the terror in those ladies' faces," McKeithen said. "If you had, you wouldn't put them in that position again."

And that is the problem, it seems at times. CCA, on its way out as operator of the jail, does not seem to see the terror in the faces. They don't seem to see the broken locks, the families trying to visit loved ones only to find the process unmanageable at times. They see a bottom line, which is what businesses do.

McKeithen said others were aware of the change in the procedure last week, and he had already decided that was not how it would be handled once the Sheriff's Office takes over. "It's designed so they can safely dispense those medicines," McKeithen said. "And that's how we intend to use it."

Ponte's job, as an employee of CCA, is to safely run the jail, maximize profits, minimize costs and serve his corporate bosses. McKeithen's job, as an elected sheriff, is to safely run the jail, minimize costs as long as it's not at the expense of the employees, while at the same time keeping his constituents happy. Those constituents include the people in jail and their families. This is not to say all will be well when the Sheriff's Office takes over. Running a jail is rarely smooth. It is to say that the sheriff is starting with a clean slate, and we hope it stays that way.

### 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.



### Boston Legal Takes On For-Profit Private Prisons

The link below will direct you to Boston Legal's Season Premiere Episode 2 which aired on September 29th about a court battle between a young girl who was raped by a private prison guard and the private prison industry's high paid attorney.

<http://fep.abc.go.com/fep/player?src=abccomjs&show=135787&pn=index>

To view Episode 2, agree to the End User License Agreement from ABC and follow their instructions to install the free player. After the player is installed select the play triangle in the center of the screen to play the episode.

**Noteworthy:** The Private Corrections Institute ( [www.PrivateCI.org](http://www.PrivateCI.org) ) provided background information to the Boston Legal's producers for this episode.