

GEO Group (Formerly Wackenhut) Rap Sheet

A publicly-traded company, GEO operates about 80,000 prison beds at 116 federal, state and local prisons and treatment facilities in the U.S. and three other countries. It reported \$62.8 million in net income on \$1.27 billion in revenues for its most recent fiscal year ending Jan. 2. It operates three prisons under contract with the Arizona Department of Corrections: the Central Arizona Correctional Facility (medium security) in Florence, and the minimum-security Phoenix West and Florence West prisons.

GEO's Questionable Record With Arizona

- After the escapes from MTC's Kingman prison last summer, the Department of Corrections very quietly conducted **security audits** of its other private prisons. At the three Geo prisons - Florence West, Phoenix West and the Central Arizona Correctional Facility - inspectors found such issues as **inmates having access to a control panel** that could open emergency exits; an **alarm system that didn't ring properly** when doors were opened or left ajar; and that **staff didn't carry out such basic security practices** as searching commissary trucks and drivers, among many other failures ("Security lapses found at all of Arizona's prisons," *Arizona Republic*, 6/26/11)
- **This year, Arizona has withheld \$6,000 in equivalent salary payments to GEO Group because the company failed to fill vacant positions quickly enough** in its Phoenix West and Florence West facilities ("Record an issue for company bidding on Ariz. Prisons contract," *Arizona Republic*, 8/8/11)
- A **2007 riot at the New Castle Correctional Facility**, an Indiana prison that housed Arizona prisoners, quickly became national news as television helicopters flew above the prison recreation yard and showed images of the melee live. **Inmates burned mattresses and threw beds and other furnishings out of the windows** of the dormitory-style housing units. **Police stormed the perimeter and used tear gas** to secure the facility. Two prison employees were injured and treated at Henry County Memorial Hospital. The **riot cost more than \$1.1 million** in police protection, repairs and improvements ("Riot costs add up for New Castle prison," *Indianapolis Star*, 4/24/08)
- Emails from Arizona DOC staff before the riot revealed **serious concerns about GEO's management** of the New Castle facility. One from the director of Arizona's Department of Correction to Indiana's DOC Commissioner stated, "**Basic security practices are lacking**, like counts and inmate discipline. Simple modifications that were proposed last week haven't been implemented." Another email from Arizona's investigator said, "I'm sick of being okey dokey about some things and have had to breathe and bite my tongue to avoid being very confrontational about things. They still **don't have accountability for their radios**, we believe that **at least one cell phone is in control of our inmates** and they are **not counting inmates correctly**." ("Arizona Officials Concerned Before & After Prison Riot," *WISH TV, Indianapolis*, 5/5/07)
- The following January in that same facility, four to six prisoners, including some from Arizona, **fought with guards** during an outdoor exercise period. After this **series of disturbances, Arizona ended the contract**. The Arizona prisoners were returned to Arizona and New Castle Correctional approached the Indiana DOC for prisoners ("Indiana prison sends inmates to Arizona," *News Sentinel*, 4/12/08).
- **In 2006, a prisoner escaped from GEO Group's Florence West prison**. He was discovered missing after prison-issued orange pants and blood were found on the perimeter fence. Blankets and clothing was used in his bunk to make it look like he was sleeping while he **climbed a recreational gate and squeezed through a barbed wire fence as other inmates watched through a window to see if he made it**. Authorities found him after he **slammed the car he was driving into three other vehicles** May 13, 2006 during a pursuit in Phoenix, injuring himself and four others ("Inmate sentenced for escape," *TriValley Central*, 12/10/08).

GEO Grope

- In 2010, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission filed a lawsuit against GEO Group Inc. alleging **the company and some male managers supervising correctional officers fostered a "sexual and sex-based hostile work environment"** at two Florence prisons that allowed harassment and retaliation against female employees. The EEOC said the male employees engaged in **verbal and physical harassment** of female employees. A male manager **grabbed and pinched** a female employee, and a female employee was **forced on a desk and kissed and touched** by a male employee, the lawsuit says. The Arizona Attorney General's Office previously filed suit and investigated complaints against the prison operator. ("Lawsuit alleges Florence prison operator allowed sexual harassment," *Arizona Republic*, 10/4/10)
- GEO Group agreed to pay a \$2.9 million settlement in a lawsuit that claimed that at **six facilities in Texas, New Mexico, Pennsylvania and Illinois** a policy of strip-searching all pretrial detainees without legal determination of reasonable were taking place. It was determined **that these strip-searches were unlawful**. ("Settlement reached over strip searches," *Express News*, 7/15/10).

The Kids Are NOT Alright

- GEO Group's Walnut Grove Juvenile prison in Mississippi made headlines recently for a record of **systemic brutality** against youth detained there. A class-action suit against the company alleges that former inmates describe an environment of violence inside the youth prison as so pervasive it became entertainment. "It'd be like setting up a fight deal like you would with two dogs," one youth said. "I did witness twice while I was at Walnut Grove, they actually bet on it. It was payday for the guards." The complaint describes rampant **contraband brought in by guards, sex between female guards and male inmates, inadequate medical care, prisoners held inhumanely in isolation, guards brutalizing inmates and inmate-on-inmate violence that was so brutal it led to brain damage**. Earlier this year, the Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Department of Justice launched its own investigation into some of these charges ("Town Relies On Troubled Youth Prison For Profits," *NPR*, 3/25/11)
- In 2007, Texas cancelled an \$8 million contract with GEO Group and closed the Coke County Juvenile Justice Center over abusive treatment and wretched conditions. Juvenile detainees as young as 13 years old slept on **filthy mats in dormitories with broken, overflowing toilets and feces smeared on the walls**. Denied outside recreation for weeks at a time, they **ate bug-infested food**, did school work that consisted of little more than crossword puzzles and **defecated in bags**. The state also opened a criminal investigation and a review of the adult prisons run by GEO. ("Troubles Mount Within Texas Youth Detention," *New York Times*, 10/16/07)
- GEO **settled suits over mistreatment of juvenile prisoners** in Michigan in 2005 and Louisiana in 2000 ("Record an issue for company bidding on Ariz. Prisons contract," *Arizona Republic*, 8/8/11)

GEO Facilities are No Bargain

- The City of Littlefield, TX had to **sell a prison at auction** this month in order to pay off the bonds for the facility after GEO Group pulled out of a contract and left the town holding the bag. The town paid for the prison with a \$10 million bond issue, but Littlefield's **credit rating suffered** as GEO Group shopped around the country for inmates to fill its beds. Idaho pulled its prisoners in 2008, GEO Group after them, and the **town's been stuck with an empty prison it hasn't finished paying for**. It **raised taxes and fees on its 6,500 residents to make room for bond payments**. ("Texas town pins hopes on prison auction Thursday, years after private operator left," *American Independent*, 7/27/11)
- The Florida state Secretary of Corrections Walter McNeil believes that **the decision to open new private prisons in the state would lead to the early release of 2,519 prisoners**. McNeil says that with the focus on private prisons, **2,249 jobs at the state department of corrections will not get filled**, which will lead to the closure of 5 state prisons and, due to overcrowding laws, the early release of

prisoners. (“DOC Secretary: Prison privatization could mean releasing inmates early,” *Palm Beach Post*, 3/29/10).

- In a report by the Florida Center for Fiscal and Economic Policy, **private prisons have done little to lower costs for the state, nor reduce recidivism**. While Florida requires that private prisons provide a 7% savings to the state, there is no way, according to FCFEP to determine whether these savings are being met. FCFEP was also **unable to find any evidence that the programs offered by private prisons work, or help to reduce recidivism**. (“Study: privatizing prisons has questionable benefits,” *South Florida Business Journal*, 4/9/10)

GEO Group: Above the Law?

- When a state drug interdiction team made a surprise visit to the privately-run prison at 2 a.m. one day in June, nobody appeared to be home. The **inspection team members, who were there to do a drug sweep, were left standing outside the gate** with their K-9. Nobody answered ringings of the buzzer. No guards were visible at the front sally port. **Nobody appeared to be in the control room lobby**. Nobody shined a light on them or approached them in any sort of perimeter-roving vehicle. After spending 15 minutes standing outside the prison trying to get somebody's attention inside, **the inspection team gave up and left**. (“South Bay prison might need more guards, or at least greeters,” *Palm Beach Post*, 8/4/11)
- Community members have alleged that oversight over GEO’s troubled Walnut Grove juvenile prison (see above, under “The Kids Are NOT Alright”) is lacking because the **town is financially dependent on the prison**. Every month, the prison pays the town \$15,000 in lieu of taxes – which comprises nearly 15 percent of its annual budget. GEO also pays the Walnut Grove Correctional Authority – which sends the prison all of its grant money – \$4,500 a month. Parents of abused juvenile detainees believe that this **financial dependence led authorities to look the other way while children were brutalized in the facility**. (“Town Relies On Troubled Youth Prison For Profits,” NPR, 3/25/11)
- In New Mexico, GEO Group **avoided millions of dollars in fines** in 2010 for having consistently high staff vacancy rates due to the company’s **cozy relationship with the state’s Corrections Director**. By contract, the state can penalize the company for not filling positions, but Corrections Director Joe Williams, a former GEO employee, chose to waive them. When New Mexico appointed a new Corrections Director last January, Williams went back to work with GEO. (“Private-prison staffing could trigger fines,” *Santa Fe New Mexican*, 4/25/11)
- **GEO group donated \$2,400,679 to state elected officials** in 23 states between 2003 and 2010. (“Gaming the System,” *Justice Policy Institute*, June 2011)
- In 2009, **GEO employees gave more than \$2,000 to the campaign fund of Sherriff Bill Gore of San Diego** where the GEO Group runs the downtown jail. Two GEO employees are being accused of lobbying county **officials to renew the San Diego downtown jail lease with GEO as well as pass responsibility for the Descanso Detention Facility to GEO group**. Campaign contributors include the warden at the downtown facility, the Director of Business and Management for the Eastern region, and the President and Chief Operating Officer for GEO. (“Please, put me in jail,” *San Diego Reader*, 2/17/10).
- Here in **Arizona**, GEO employs lobbying firm **Public Policy Partners**. In 2010, at least 6 individuals associated with PPP made **contributions to Rep. John Kavanagh, Chair of the powerful House Appropriations Committee**, which must approve the funds for the contract that GEO is currently bidding for (“Arizona’s private prison pay-to-play scandal widens,” *Tucson Citizen*, 7/20/11)

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