

How State Funds Are Spent ON Prisons

By Beverly Jaynes

My wish for the new year is that some public or media entity would investigate how state funds are spent by the Missouri Department of Corrections (MODOC) in its contracts and procurements with private companies such as: CMS/Corizon health care, Mental Health Management, and Missouri Vocational Enterprise, which produces goods in MODOC factories using cheap prisoner labor (mostly earning 50¢ per hour) and sells those goods to MODOC and to the prisoners, who are allowed to buy only MVE made clothing.

If only the following questions could be asked: why does MODOC grant contracts to the highest bidding companies, like CMS/Corizon? If it is because they provide better care and services, why then have the visits of WERDCC offenders to outside medical specialists, most notably for hysterectomies and liver biopsies, been drastically curtailed since Corizon took over CMS?

Why does MODOC and the Missouri Legislature still refuse to ban smoking on prison grounds, like most states have done long ago? Is it because tobacco products are prison canteens' best selling items and because of the influence of tobacco companies and their lobbyists? Is it because MODOC uses the canteen funds that are supposed to be spent on the prisoners, to purchase prison supplies? Until smoking is banned on prison grounds, second-hand smoke will persist inside of prison dormitories and will need the attention of many staff, who deal with smoking violations.

Why is MODOC using as a consultant to them, the director of Mental Health Management, Dr. Greg Markway (thus he helps to monitor his own company)? Is this conflict of interest?

Prison is a growth industry in that private outsourcing and contracting allows profits to grow only through the containment of as many prisoners as possible. If prison beds go empty, funds to prisons are cut. Is this one of the reasons that the Missouri Legislature made into law the 85% time served stipulation on some prison sentences, to keep beds full? Is that why elderly prisoners with 0% stipulation are being held longer too?

Why is MO DOC purchasing from MVE, louver shutters to cover windows of some of its segregated housing units, "as funds become available"? This must be expensive because CCC has ~~only~~ been able to cover ^{only} half of the windows in one of its two segregated housing units, which were built only five years ago. Administrators say, "Research to purchase the louvers began in 2011", (was this "research", sales pitches by MVE?), but they won't say why or at what cost. Their response to the complaint I had filed about sunlight and the view of nature being blocked ~~into~~ ^{from} my dank cell, which can cause mental depression (a well known, scientific fact), was: "You fail to provide evidence to substantiate your claim." So I'm asking people to send me information on the effects of deprivation of natural light on human beings.

The most important question is: Are state funds being diverted from more important needs of the state, like education and pay increases for state employees (MO Correction Officers claim to be the lowest paid in the U.S.) so that MO DOC can make more costlier contracts and less needed expenditures? Are Missouri's Tea Party legislators as critical of this kind of government spending as they are about food stamps and Medicaid? Am I the only one asking these questions?