

"In the state of Virginia, and prisons nationwide, Keefe Commissary Network has become the leading most profitable industry supplying not only food items, but hygiene products as well.

In recent years, our privilege of purchasing items from authorized outside vendors has been eliminated and items supposedly similar are now provided by Keefe. I feel that this was another stratagem to keep the wealth within the prison retail market.

The articles offered by Keefe are of contemptible quality and very expensive. The cost for a thirteen-inch flat screen television is two-hundred seventeen dollars and three cents. This is simply preposterous! For those employed by a job

inside of the prison, the wages are parsimonious. Here in Fluvanna Correctional Center for Women, the beginning stipend for any position other than one with the Enterprise Industry, is only twenty-seven cents per hour. To purchase a television earning this salary, an offender must work close to one-thousand hours!

Not only is there manufacture of pitiable products, but the state has begun to follow suit. In this facility, there are six buildings that house offenders. There are twelve-hundred of us here held as wards of the state of Virginia, which requires them to provide us with the basic necessities essential to survival inside these walls regardless of the length of your sentence. Offenders are equipped with two towels, two washcloths,

three bras, three pairs of panties,
and three pairs of socks.

Toiletries include two bars of
soap, and three rolls of toilet
paper per week. Sanitary napkins
are supplied two at a time, as
well as tampons, which have
become available once again as
a result of lawsuits filed nation-
wide. Why must we have to
struggle and fight for items
intrinsic as women?

Sadly, the quality of things
as simple as the panties we
receive, to the more important
things such as mattresses and
pillows, continue to decline. By
no means are we here to be
made comfortable. However,
when all you have is a mattress
approximately five inches thick
separating you from a metal
slab, what do they expect to
happen to our bodies as a
result of this? There is no

possible way to keep our spine aligned, especially with the pillows we are forced to lay on. They are made with a cheap, plastic coating with something only slightly more durable than cotton! And what happens to those with a preexisting condition such as any form of arthritis? These are chronic conditions for which, there is no cure. It will only progress as time passes. Speaking from a person with this condition, the mattress I received not even two months ago, has already begun to flatten out.

Also, sadly, for women with a large bust, bras which would provide adequate support are unavailable. Even for those whom do not require as much support, the selections are limited. Our panties now are usually wearable and washable only once before they begin to

tear. Only the socks are out-lasting, but not too much longer.

Our shirts and pants are sewn on-site by the Tailorship Enterprise. They also have become shabby. Clothing is ill-fitting, and literally coming apart by the seams after a few washes. When clothing becomes torn and flesh is exposed, it is such a difficult task for staff to perform a simple job duty and send offenders to personal property to replace ruined clothing. What is so arduous about making a phone call? And when we ask repeatedly, we become burdensome and our requests fall on deaf ears. We are waved off and still not supplied with what we need.

Cleaning supplies pose a very large problem also. Chemicals which are necessary

to maintain cleanliness and kill germs in a medical facility, are heavily diluted. What are we to do if we cannot contain the germs in a facility where they run rampant? For me, and for many others I'm certain, we consider this to be not only unsanitary, but a health risk as well. The thin white cloths we are given to wipe down everything, sinks and toilets included, are torn in half in an effort to stretch the little we are lucky to receive.

And the food served is completely unacceptable! For example, there was an instance when a packaged food product was to be prepared by a kitchen employee. Concerned with what was to be cooked and served, this woman took the time to read the product label, which specifically stated, "Not suitable for human

consumption. "Somehow, staff seems to think that this is okay. Some food does not even look suitable for animal consumption! I suppose as long as the kitchen supervisor receives his/her annual bonus for staying under budget, who cares what we eat? Who cares if the cauliflower we need for our serving of vegetables is gray in color and not edible? Of course food is fresh and well prepared for staff dining. Imagine that!

In speaking for myself from experience, and speaking for others as well, I feel that we all are beginning to become more inquisitive in regards to where all of this money supposedly designated to house us is being spent. We should all encourage our families to begin to closely examine just where their tax money is being allocated!"