

SB

99

SFIN

FILE

SB 99

**was referred to the
Senate Finance
Committee**

**No hearing was held
on this bill**



Alaska State Legislature

Please enter into the record my testimony to the Senate Finance
committee name

Committee on SB 99 Correctional Facilities, dated 4-29-03
bill # / subject public hearing date

Honorable Senators,

Speaking as a private citizen with 17 years of service to the State of Alaska as a Correctional Officer, I'm writing here today to once again speak out against the introduction of private prisons to the State of Alaska. For the past four years, I have spoken out against private prison operators and will continue to do so. In my efforts to stay fully informed of the dangers, pitfalls and liabilities of the privatization of the prison system, I have read literally thousands of pieces of correspondence and other related information concerning private prison operators. I have served at the forefront with those who have dedicated their lives to keeping the public informed of the dangers of dealing with those whose intention is solely to profit from human misery. I can only let the facts speak for themselves:

Escapes: History continues to show that private prison operators have an escape rate that is over 20 times higher than their publicly run counterparts. This measure is based on simple numbers of escapes. Never mind the fact that public prisons continue to hold higher numbers of prisoners. Paid proponents for private prisons would have you believe simply that "prisoners escape." Is this supposed to mean that these high numbers of escapes are simply business as usual?

Cost Savings: Several studies to date have shown that private prison operators simply do not provide the cost savings they promise. In several cases, the costs associated with private prison operators are actually higher than their publicly operated counterparts. The paid proponents of privatization make claims of large savings. What needs to be remembered is that these claims of savings compare the total cost of keeping prisoners incarcerated with the partial services provided by private prison operators. In the bottom line, the total costs of operating a private prison added to the costs of complete services will ultimately cost the State more.

Liability: Prisoners are an extremely litigious group as a whole. Contracting with private operators absolutely does not remove any liability from the State or the prison owners when it comes to lawsuits. Private prison employees also do not have qualified immunity, which protects them from lawsuits. In other words, prisoners may sue private employees individually. Once sued, a private prison employee's only protection or defense may be to file suit against the State along with the prisoners resulting in much higher costs to the State.

Staff Turnover Rates: Publicly operated prisons average nationally, a 16% staff turnover. Privately operated prisons have a 53% turnover rate. Substandard pay, poor training, lack of experienced staff and poor recruitment/screening standards all contribute to the inability of privately operated prisons to maintain the experienced and professional staff needed to insure public safety and a professionally run facility.

Assaults and Major Violence: In privately operated prisons, prisoner to staff assaults are 49% higher. Prisoner on prisoner assaults are 66% higher. All this translates to higher costs to the State. In some States, the incidence of major violence is almost double that of a publicly operated facility.

Alaska Communities Speak Out: Several Alaska communities have had the opportunity to speak out using the voting process. When given the opportunity to vote on the issue, these communities have overwhelmingly voted down having a privately operated prison in their areas. Despite this, several Legislators continue to support and defend the idea of using private prison operators in Alaska. This only leaves me with the question, "Who do these Legislators truly support?"

In closing, let me reiterate that my experience and research has left me with only these conclusions. Private prison operators will cost Alaskan's more money. Public safety will be compromised. The incidence of violence in Alaska prisons will increase leaving our State to continue to pay the costs.

Signed: Rick VanHatten

Testifier

 Self

Representing (optional)

 840 Set Net Dr Kenai, AK 99611

Address

 283-3411

Phone number