

PRIVATIZATION SCREWS CORRECTIONS EMPLOYEES, TAXPAYERS AND PRISONERS

Michigan Awards Prison Food Service Contract to Aramark Correctional Services

On December 1st, per its new contract with the state, Aramark Correctional Services will begin running Food Service for the Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC), creating another sector of low-wage workers in Michigan. Instead of rewarding MDOC Food Service employees for their years of loyal service, the state of Michigan took away their decent-paying jobs with benefits and gave them the choice of quitting or working for Aramark at the poverty wage of \$10.00 per hour. In a state struggling with a high unemployment rate and flooded with low-wage dead-end jobs, 60,000 in the fast food sector in the metro Detroit area alone, why would the state government choose to add to these statistics?

Michigan's ill-advised rush into the piecemeal privatization of the MDOC is akin to driving a car through a 3-ring circus and over a cliff. However, instead of Ringling Brothers, Barnum & Bailey, the MDOC has Corizon Inc. (Health Service), Keefe Commissary Network (Prisoner Store) and, now, Aramark (Food Service). All three are, essentially, middlemen with their hands in taxpayers' pockets, not to mention the pockets of their employees, prisoners and their families, and offer little or nothing in return for the millions of dollars they skim, aside from bribery disguised as campaign donations and the occasional kickback in return for contracts. Moreover, not one of them is a Michigan-based business.

Corizon is simply the cover-name for the infamous Correctional Medical Services Inc. (CMS), whose failure to provide adequate healthcare to Michigan prisoners was exposed in August 2006, causing then-governor Jennifer Granholm to announce an independent review which resulted in CMS's replacement by Prison Health Services Inc. (PHS). CMS solved this problem by merging with PHS, changing its name to Corizon, and is back feeding at the state taxpayer trough. Keefe, of course, is infamous for taking over prisoner stores and raising prices, i.e., price gouging. The latest name in this circus, Aramark, has a well-documented history of underbidding DOC contracts so badly that they have to cut prisoner meals down to a near bread and water diet in order to turn a profit. See David M. Reutter, "Aramark Discontinues, Loses Food Service Contracts," Prison Legal News (PLN), Oct. 2009, pp36-37.

It seems Aramark's plan, in part, relies on prisoners feeding themselves by buying the egregiously overpriced garbage sold in prisoner stores operated by Keefe's kickback and bribery specialists. See David M. Reutter, "Florida DOC and Keefe Gouge Prisoners on Commissary Sales," PLN, Oct. 2009, p25; and "Florida: Two Men Sentenced in Prison Canteen Kickback Scheme," PLN, Oct. 2012, p40.

In order for a private corporation to takeover a publicly funded operation in Michigan, such as MDOC Food Service, there has to be a certain percentage of savings involved for the state. MDOC Food Service's 4-week cycle menu reportedly feeds one prisoner at a cost of \$600 per year, or approximately \$1.65 per day per prisoner. An unbelievably low figure, unless one has eaten the food as I have, then not so much. Incredibly, Aramark claims it can feed a prisoner for even less, yet they needed \$2.76 per prisoner per day to feed Oakland County Jail prisoners in 2011 according to Undersheriff Michael McCabe. See Chris Christoff, "What Snyder may try to cut," The Detroit Free Press, 1/16/11, 5A.

As such, it would seem nigh unto impossible for Aramark to feed a prisoner for less than \$2 per day. All the moreso, since they couldn't do it in Florida at the contracted \$1.77 per prisoner per day, and wound-up paying millions of dollars in penalties for terminating their FDOC Food Service contract in 2008. Their ploy to underbid DOC contracts, then underfeed prisoners in order to make a fat profit has failed not only in Florida, but in Indiana and Kentucky as well. See PLN, Oct. 2009, pp36-37; PLN, Dec. 2006, p10; and PLN, June 2006, p25.

It's unlikely Aramark's plan for MDOC Food Service is any different than in those states - underbid to get the contract and rake in millions of taxpayer dollars before the marks - the taxpayers - catch on. Consequently, Aramark's running MDOC Food Service will be a short-lived and epic failure so far as Michigan's taxpayers are concerned. At which point, they can only hope the penalties for termination are high enough to cover the costs of rebooting MDOC Food Service by hiring, and re-hiring, qualified employees from among Michigan's citizens and paying them a fair wage with benefits.

Consequently, the harm inflicted by Aramark will be almost immediate. At this very moment, Aramark is advertising for food service employees at \$10.00 per hour. A poverty wage that will only serve to increase the smuggling of tobacco and drugs into Michigan's prisons, resulting in further loss of control in prisons where control is already critical. It's well-documented that corrections employees are responsible for over 90% of contraband smuggled into prison and underpaying them serves to incentivize their smuggling.

On the other hand, the atrociously inadequate healthcare provided by Corizon will take more time to manifest, aside from the occasional unnecessary prisoner death, as they cut costs by denying any type of preventive healthcare and pretending long diagnosed medical conditions have miraculously disappeared. For example, diagnosed colo-rectal, prostate and skin cancers remain untreated for years, diagnosed hernias remain intentionally untreated, with patients' intestines protruding through their abdominal walls, until they strangulate, while pain management is nonexistent, etc.

Corizon's business model is to provide little or no healthcare until sued and then offer low-ball settlements, to prisoners or deceased prisoners' estates, because in Corizon's eyes prisoners' lives aren't worth very much and certainly not worth adversely affecting their bottom line. Eventually, Corizon will bail-out with their bank accounts swollen at state taxpayers' expense, as will Aramark and Keefe, and the taxpayers will end up footing the bill for an aged and poorly cared for prisoner population. The inevitable chickens coming home to roost.

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