



# Private Prisons: The Public's Problem

An Investigation into the Performance of  
Arizona's Private, For-Profit Prisons

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**American Friends Service Committee, Arizona Program**

103 N. Park Avenue, Suite #111

Tucson, AZ 85719

520.623.9141

[afscaz@afsc.org](mailto:afscaz@afsc.org)

**The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) is a Quaker organization that includes people of various faiths who are committed to social justice, peace, and humanitarian service. Our work is based on the principles of the Religious Society of Friends, the belief in the worth of every person, and faith in the power of love to overcome violence and injustice. AFSC was founded in 1917 by Quakers to provide conscientious objectors with an opportunity to aid civilian war victims. The Arizona office of AFSC was established in 1980 and focuses on criminal justice reform.**

## **About the Author**

*Caroline Isaacs* is the Program Director for the American Friends Service Committee office in Tucson, Arizona. She has worked at AFSC for the last 15 years, focusing on criminal justice reform in Arizona. Isaacs has a Bachelor's in Political Science from the College of Wooster and a Master's in Social Work from Arizona State University, where she teaches as an adjunct faculty member and serves as a Field Student Liaison.

## **Acknowledgments**

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This preliminary report is available from the AFSC web site as a PDF: <http://afsc.org/arizona-prison-report>. The full report will be posted to the same address when complete.



These are the preliminary findings of a report that, when released, will be the first of its kind in Arizona. To date there has been no government or independent analysis of the performance and quality of all prisons in the state. Given that private for-profit prisons have operated in Arizona for decades, this fact in itself is shocking. Arizona has invested millions of taxpayer dollars in for-profit prisons but has provided no evidence that these prisons are safe, cost effective, or competent at fulfilling the job taxpayers pay them to do.

When AFSC learned that the state had not properly monitored and reported on for-profit prison operations, as mandated by law, AFSC undertook its own investigation into the prison industry in Arizona.

The conclusions below are based on data from published studies, news reports, state audits, Department of Corrections data and safety inspection reports, and first-person testimony. The full report will paint a more complete so far available picture of the performance of for-profit prisons in Arizona.

Included in the study are data on six prisons operated by Corrections Corporation of America that are located in Arizona but do not contract with the state, putting them outside state oversight. This data provides a unique glimpse inside a group of prisons that most Arizonans don't even know exist.

In response to public pressure, the Arizona Department of Corrections agreed in August 2011 to prepare a report of its own. AFSC believes that the public deserve an independent assessment before the signing of contracts for additional for-profit prisons.

*Regardless of differing political views, most Arizonans want the same thing from their prisons: increased public safety.*

In the summer of 2010, three inmates escaped from the privately operated Kingman prison, killed two people, and shattered the myth that private prisons can keep us safe. Since that time, more evidence has come to light unmasking the truth about the prison industry in Arizona: It is costly, plagued by security problems, and in some cases are violating state and federal law. State leaders have failed in their responsibility to protect the public, provide oversight of these facilities, or hold the corporations accountable for their failures.

AFSC's analysis found patterns of serious safety lapses in all the private prisons for which data was available. Together, this data demonstrates a set of problems endemic to the industry and could lead to future tragedies like the Kingman escapes. Under-trained guards combined with poor state oversight leads to assaults, disturbances, and riots. For-profit prison staff members are too often unprepared, or unwilling, to intervene in these events, and risk losing control of the facilities. Insufficient rehabilitation programs, educational opportunities, or jobs for the prisoners provide idle time for conflicts to brew. The result is facilities that are unsafe for the people living and working inside them, as well as the surrounding community.

*AFSC is releasing these preliminary findings to help the public understand the scope of the problem caused by prison privatization in Arizona and to encourage more discussion and review before any more public funds are spent on private prison beds.*



## Preliminary Findings

### **1. Arizona is wasting money on prison privatization.**

The Arizona Department of Corrections cost comparison review of public and for-profit prisons in 2009 found that minimum security beds in for-profit prisons cost the state \$121 more per prisoner per year than state-operated minimum security beds; for medium security beds, the state lost \$2,834 per prisoner per year. Assuming full capacity of each of the five for-profit prisons currently under contract with the state, the state of Arizona may have wasted over \$83 million on for-profit prison beds in 2011.<sup>i</sup>

### **2. Arizona does not need 5,000 more prison beds.**

Arizona's prison population grew by only 65 prisoners (net) in 2010 and actually *declined* by 296 prisoners in 2011. Projections indicate that 2012 will follow a similar pattern.<sup>ii</sup>

### **3. All prisons in Arizona for which security assessment information was available had serious security flaws.**

Failures uncovered in security inspections of privately operated state prisons include: malfunctioning cameras, doors, and alarms; holes under fences; broken perimeter lights and cameras; and ineffective security practices by corrections officers and managers.<sup>iii</sup> The patterns of assaults, disturbances, and riots in private prisons in Arizona demonstrate a lack of control of the facilities on the part of prison operators:

- The Kingman prison, from which three prisoners escaped, had “13 instances of large groups of inmates refusing directives or chasing MTC staff off the yard” in 5 years<sup>iv</sup>
- CCA's La Palma Correctional Facility, which houses prisoners from California, had an extremely high rate of assaults in 2009 and 2010. While La Palma is a medium-security facility, the rate of assaults was more than twice that of the Arizona Department of Corrections system, including all security levels, even maximum security.
- The Eloy Detention Center, also operated by CCA, had the most deaths of immigrants in ICE custody nationwide—9 deaths since 2003.<sup>v</sup>



**4. For-profit prison corporations are buying influence in Arizona government.**

The companies operating prisons lobby aggressively, make political campaign contributions, and secure high-level government appointments for corporate insiders.<sup>vi</sup>

Most of the public data used as the basis of this research is available online:

<http://afsc.org/arizona-prison-report>.

The remaining source data will be released along with the final report.

*The solution is greater public control over prisons in Arizona, not less.*

### **Recommendations for Immediate Action**

AFSC is concerned about plans to sign contracts for additional prison beds, given the data available.

1. The Arizona Department of Corrections should permanently cancel the Request for Proposals for 5,000 new for-profit prison beds.
2. The Governor or Legislature should impose an immediate moratorium on new prison construction.
3. The Arizona Department of Corrections should immediately schedule a public meeting with the American Friends Service Committee to review the data and discuss the best ways to ensure public safety, fiscal responsibility, and public oversight of its prisons.

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<sup>i</sup> Davenport, Debra K. "Department of Corrections – Prison Population Growth": <http://afsc.org/document/auditor-generals-report-prison-population-growth>

<sup>ii</sup> Charles Ryan, "Fiscal Year 2011 ADC Data and Information" PowerPoint presentation: <http://afsc.org/document/arizona-department-corrections-data-and-information-report>



<sup>iii</sup> Sondberg, Shelly. "Security Assessment—MTC: Marana and GEO: Florence West, Phoenix West and CACF." Memo to Robert Patton dated August 22, 2010. <http://azdatapages.com/datacenter/DOC-private-prison-review.html>

<sup>iv</sup> Ryan, Charles, "Cure Notice" to MTC. Memo to Odie Washington, dated September 29, 2010. <http://azdatapages.com/datacenter/Cure-notice-to-MTC.html>

<sup>v</sup> Anglen, Robert "Nine dead: Eloy tops list of immigration detainee deaths," azcentral.com. August 18, 2009. <http://www.azcentral.com/members/Blog/WATCHBLOG/60588>

<sup>vi</sup> Ortega, Bob, "Arizona prison businesses are big political contributors": <http://www.azcentral.com/news/articles/2011/09/04/20110904arizona-prison-business-politics.html>