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Argumentative Writing Essay

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### Privatization of Prisons in Hawaii Hurts Society

While sending Hawaii prisoners to the mainland US may seem like a cost-effective and efficient way of getting rid of Hawaii's least desirable citizens, the practice has many problems including long travel times for inmates and their families, mismanagement and misconduct at the privately-owned mainland prisons, and the issue that Hawaii's continued reliance on the mainland US relegates Hawaii to its former colonial status.

The mainland US is about 3,000 miles away from Hawaii. In order for Hawaii to send an inmate to the mainland, the state must charter an airplane and hire guards to escort the inmate during the trip. If the inmate is required to attend judicial functions while incarcerated on the mainland, the State must provide video conferencing equipment to enable the inmate attend their hearings, not a desirable situation at all. Housing inmates on the mainland also makes rehabilitation all but impossible. Most Hawaii inmates housed on the mainland will eventually return here. Unfortunately, because of the distance and separation from family and friends, mainland inmates have a more difficult time maintaining ties and support from family and friends. This alienation makes re-entering society more difficult than if support networks are maintained.

Since private prisons on the mainland have no financial or political interest in rehabilitation of Hawaii's inmates, they are far less likely to receive training and other resources to enable them not to re-offend. Some could argue that since private prisons are contracted on a per-inmate basis, they actually have a financial incentive for an inmate to return to prison after release. (Prison)

Private mainland prisons are run primarily with the idea of making money, those prisons often have procedures which cause inmates and staff to encounter safety problems. For example, there are

many riots at private prisons and since there is less staffing, usually more people are injured before the limited number of correctional officers can control the situation. People who support the privatization of prisons often say that by having businesses manage prisons they are able to achieve greater efficiency because it introduces price competition into an area where there was previously no competing interests. Private prisons are also said to be able to provide services to states more cheaply, with more innovation and better quality because private enterprise is less constrained by bureaucracy and has greater agility to experiment and make changes. (Gaes)

One problem with the desire for profit is that private prisons are often staffed with less correctional officers and that lack of staffing makes private prisons more dangerous than public ones. Kevin Dayton writing for the Honolulu Advertiser gives an example of this danger in the number of riots that have occurred involving Hawaii inmates at Halawa which is The Hawaii State prison and the private prisons on the mainland. Correctional officials in Hawaii have said that they cannot recall a single riot at Halawa, however there are been at least 11 riots involving Hawaii inmates and private mainland prisons. Interpersonal violence is also more common at private prisons one national study found that there were 49% more inmate on staff assaults and 65% more inmate on inmate assaults happened in private facilities than a government run prisons. (Years)

Two noteworthy examples of staff inmate-on-inmate assaults have occurred at private prisons, run by the Corrections Corporation of America and caused Hawaii inmates to suffer severe injury. In one instance, which occurred in 2005 in Mississippi, a corrupt prison guard opened cell doors which caused inmates who had been separated to intermingle and fight. The fighting left Hawaii inmate Ronnie Lonoaea severely injured and permanently confined to a wheelchair. On June 26, 2007 an incident occurred in Arizona: an error by prison staff also caused cell doors to abruptly open and another Hawaii inmate was stabbed. (Another)

Negative influence on Hawaii inmates by mainland prisoners is another unanticipated consequence of intermingling Hawaii prisoners with mainland prisoners at private prisons. Halawa guards reported that there was very little gang activity at Hawaii's prison prior to the privatization on the mainland but now when mainland prisoners returned to Hawaii they had established gangs and the gang mentality had spread to Halawa. (Years)

Hawaii prison officials also discovered that mainland prisons are not abiding by the contracts that they agreed to win the world warded contracts to care for Hawaii's inmates. Many of the rehabilitation programs such as job training and substance abuse reduction that were supposed to be offered in mainland prisons have not happened according to State of Hawaii prison monitors. (Years)

The desire to use private prisons in the United States began in the 1980s when a combination of two factors caused the prison population to grow dramatically and the amount of funding for prisons to be reduced dramatically. During that decade there was a great deal of drug enforcement and the whole "just say no to drugs" campaign that punished a lot of drug use that in prior decades would be overlooked and not prosecuted, this caused many people to enter the prison system. During that decade there was also a dramatic decrease in the amount of federal funding for corrections and other institutions. This reduction in federal funding states had to find cheaper ways of caring for prison inmates. The first private prison was opened in 1984 and it was utilized by the Immigration and Naturalization Service. Since that time private prison usage has grown dramatically. Currently more than 32 states and Puerto Rico utilize private prisons within the United States. (McFarland)

Although the trend is toward privatization, there are many reasons why Hawaii should not be part of that trend. Our state is thousands of miles away from the continental US. The culture of the people in our state is probably the most unique among US citizens. And for political reasons it is important that Hawaii be self-sufficient and non-reliant upon other US states.

The idea that Hawaii is not reliant on the mainland US for its vital services is one that has been around since statehood. If Hawaii relies on the mainland for such a vital service as corrections, what message does that send about the State of Hawaii. We would be far better to build prisons here to enable the State to be perceived as self-sufficient as the other states.

Ira Rohter, writing in "A Green Economy for Hawaii," explains the problem with having to rely on the mainland US for resources. The main difficulty with dealing with out of state businesses is that this reliance on them causes the profit that is derived from Hawaii-based consumption to leave Hawaii. If prisons and other entities remained on Hawaii, the money that is spent in those businesses would stay in Hawaii and would more likely be reinvested here. This reinvestment of capital would further boost the economy and create a more-diverse economic and financial base so that the people here would have more opportunities and more economic clout.

Throughout this essay, this writer has provided evidence that Hawaii's inmate population is better housed in Hawaii than on the mainland US. The reasons for this claim are that it is cheaper and easier to transport prisoners within the state, by running its own prisons, the State has more oversight and control over how the facilities are run and by keeping prisons here, the State creates more jobs for Hawaiians and is able to rely less on mainland resources.

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