

**SUPPORTING TESTIMONY OF
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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
AFSCME COUNCIL 13**

**JOINT HEARING BEFORE THE
HOUSE LABOR AND JUDICIARY COMMITTEES**

**STATE AND COUNTY
PRISON PRIVATIZATION
IN PENNSYLVANIA**

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One example that illustrates the modis operandi of the private prison operators is the matter of guard salaries. The private industry stopped supplying wage data and other important statistics to industry associations and publications when it realized that this self-reported data was being used against it. However, the most recent comparative industry data, which can be found in the 2000 edition of *The Corrections Yearbook*, shows the average annual starting salary for public correction officers was 30% higher than the average starting salary received by private prison guards. Moreover, the average maximum salary for private prison guards was still lower than the average starting salary for public correction officers!

The maximum salaries for private prison guards may not be an issue because the high turnover that characterizes private prisons typically means that the guards do not last long. The poor pay undoubtedly contributes to the high turnover that exists in private prisons, a whopping 52.2%, on average, compared to 16% in publicly run prisons. A green workforce and chronic understaffing are often the result of the high turnover that exists in privately managed correctional facilities, which then leads to the unreasonably dangerous conditions that exist in privately managed correctional institutions.

George Washington University Professor James Austin, an expert on private prisons and inmate classification, compared the rates of major incidents in private and public prisons of comparable security levels and found that private prisons had 50% more inmate-on-staff assaults and two-thirds more inmate-on-inmate assaults. The following incidents illustrate this point: in just a year's time, four inmates and a private prison guard were killed in Wackenhut's (now known as The Geo Group's) two New Mexico prisons. In addition, The Geo Group closed a juvenile facility in Louisiana after the Justice Department said that the facility's conditions were "life-threatening."

held to the same open records standards as the public sector, so there may be other important information that was not discovered and reported by the various news outlets and/or monitoring agencies.

In summary, there is convincing evidence that privatized corrections does not work, does not save money and is bad public policy.