Private prison corporation CoreCivic facing multiple lawsuits for endangering Tennessee inmates

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There are currently three ongoing lawsuits regarding the endangerment of diabetic inmates at the Trousdale Turner Correctional Facility in rural Tennessee.

The facility, located in north central Tennessee approximately an hour north east of Nashville, is owned and operated by the for-profit prison company CoreCivic (formerly Corrections Corporation of America) under a state contract. Since its opening in 2016, the Trousdale prison has been the site of one abuse after another.

In a class-action lawsuit brought against CoreCivic earlier this month, Trousdale inmates say they were denied diabetic medication. One of the prisoners, Douglas Dodson, wrote on a prisoner complaint form, "For the past 2½ weeks we have been on lock down, and it has been several evenings that we have not been called to the clinic to get our insulin."

Inmates say around 60 diabetic prisoners are in danger because of inadequate access to diabetic medication. The danger of life-threatening complications is further heightened by what prisoners describe as unhealthy food and erratic meal times.

Understaffing—a byproduct of CoreCivic's focus on locking down the facility and maximizing profits rather than adequately providing such things as healthcare or meals for the inmates—has resulted in inmates waiting for hours before they receive needed insulin shots after meals.

In 2016, a former Trousdale inmate sued over similar circumstances, and a third lawsuit was filed earlier this year after an inmate, Jonathan Salada, died after several days in excruciating pain due to diabetes complications and lack of care.

According to an August 7 report in the *Tennessean*, "CoreCivic has denied wrongdoing in all three suits and insisted that the plaintiffs in the class-action care are responsible for their own diabetes complications."

Numerous other lawsuits across the state of Tennessee against the company suggest degrading and lethal conditions throughout CoreCivic facilities.

In Davidson County, where the state capital of Nashville is located, officers and employees' families sued CoreCivic over a scabies outbreak. The company failed to address the complaints of employees for months until CoreCivic notified the health department. Employees had to be quarantined. One inmate said she had a rash for about four months and 80 other women in the facility were treated as well.

A former chaplain, who states she was fired after making complaints to staff about prisoners being denied religious services, filed another lawsuit for wrongful termination and defamation.

A judge in Chattanooga subpoenaed Silverdale Detention Center for five cases of medical abuse occurring over just a few months. Medication was reportedly being withheld. Women's healthcare was neglected, with some women developing infections due to lack of adequate feminine hygiene products. One inmate reported being told, after she was denied the birth control pills she took to stabilize mood swings, "Well, you got yourself in here."

In one particularly harrowing case at the South Central Correctional Facility in Clifton, Tennessee, Christopher Hall cut off his testicles after not receiving medical attention. Hall had to be transported to a hospital in Nashville because medics could not control the bleeding.

A state audit also found rampant gang activity at

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CoreCivic facilities. A former employee told *USA Today Network – Tennessee* he felt less safe working at Trousdale Turner Correctional Facility than he did during his two decades in the Army, which included a deployment to the Middle East during the first Gulf War.

However, these problems are not isolated to Tennessee. Private prisons all over the country are routinely the sites of prisoner abuse and neglect. In T. Don Hutto Residential Center, a CoreCivic immigration detention center run on behalf of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in Taylor, Texas, female inmates reported being continually sexually harassed by a guard.

Inmates at a for-profit facility in San Diego sued CoreCivic for forcing them to clean their own jail for less than a dollar a day. According to the lawsuit, "In some instances, CoreCivic pays detainees $1 dollar per day, and in other instances detainees are not compensated with wages at all, for their labor and services."

Prisoners were ordered to clean the jail, prepare and serve meals, and do laundry, among other many other duties. Jonathan Gomez, one of the plaintiffs, described his work environment as "unsafe."

In addition to understaffing, cutting corners on medical care, and using the slave labor of inmates, CoreCivic maximizes profits by being organized as a Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT). This allows the company to avoid paying taxes at the corporate rate. In 2013, before the company converted to a REIT, it was subject to a 36 percent tax rate. In 2015, the company reported paying an effective tax rate of just 3 percent.

Both CoreCivic and Geo Group reorganized as REITs following a private letter ruling by the Obama administration changing the IRS tax classification. Private prison companies argue renting out cells to the government is the equivalent of charging tenants, therefore, the business is actually a real estate venture.

This past week, protesters blocked the entrance to CoreCivic's corporate headquarters in Nashville, Tennessee. Police dispersed the Occupy-style protest in approximately nine hours, arresting 20 protesters who were charged with criminal trespassing.

Among the protesters was former CoreCivic employee Ashley Dixon. Dixon worked at Trousdale Turner Correctional Center. This past December, she testified to the Tennessee state legislature about the horrible conditions she witnessed at the prison, including the deaths of two inmates.

"The first death, I missed work for days. I just couldn't go in. I actually attended the prisoner's funeral out of state," she told lawmakers. She repeatedly reported problems to superiors, but nothing changed.

"I was just so wrecked because I don't think he needed to die, and I tried so hard to convince people of that for three days."

She told the *Nashville Scene* during the protest: "One of them [a prisoner who died] was only 25 years old, and I listened to him scream in pain for three days. I tried to get him help, but the higher-ups just told me, 'He's just faking it, don't worry about it.'"

For-profit prisons like CoreCivic are not a new phenomenon associated with the Trump administration. In 2016, the Obama administration awarded CoreCivic a $1 billion no-bid contract to detain asylum seekers from Central America.

The company has been richly rewarded for its long-term services to the state; the company's reported revenue for the fourth quarter of 2017 alone was $440.6 million. As of 2015, over half of its revenues were generated through contracts with federal prison authorities.

In fact, the profits of private prisons have soared since September 11, 2001. Investors in these companies are aware that the United States represents only 4.4 percent of the world's population but accounts for 22 percent of the world's prisoners, and are keen to turn a profit on these modern-day dungeons.

The author recommends:

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