Legislative Testimony
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Written Testimony Supporting Senate Bill 1328, An Act Prohibiting Private Ownership, Operation, or Management of State Correctional Facilities

Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom, Ranking Members Kissel and Fishbein, and members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Jess Zaccagnino, and I am the policy counsel of the American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut (ACLU-CT). I am writing to testify in Senate Bill 1328, An Act Prohibiting Private Ownership, Operation, or Management of State Correctional Facilities.

The ACLU-CT is an organization dedicated to ending mass incarceration, eliminating racial disparities in the criminal legal system, and reducing harms to justice-impacted people. The United States incarcerates people at an unprecedented rate—denying people of their freedom, separating families, and draining communities and governments of their resources. At the same time, the private prison industry expanded rapidly since 1984 and is now a $5 billion industry[1] built on the backs of people who are incarcerated, who are overwhelmingly Black people and people of color. Currently, private prisons incarcerate 19 percent of people incarcerated in federal prisons and 9 percent of all people incarcerated in state prisons across the country.[2] Approximately 75 percent of all immigrants detained by ICE are incarcerated in private prisons.[3] There is a duopoly in our country's private prison industry: just two companies, CoreCivic and GEO Group, own 79 percent of the

[1] *See, e.g.*, *The Private Prison Industry, Explained*, THE WEEK (Aug. 6, 2018), https://theweek.com/articles/788226/private-prison-industry-explained.
[2] *Id.*
[3] *Id.*

market.[4] Terrel Don Hutto, the founder of CoreCivic, ran a cotton plantation the size of Manhattan where mostly Black people convicted of crimes were forced to pick cotton for no pay. The Hutto family lived on the plantation and had a house servant, who was also unpaid.[5] **This was in 1967.**

We can expect to see the private prison industry grow under the second Trump administration, especially when it comes to working with ICE. When Trump was elected in 2016 and 2024, stocks in the private prison industry skyrocketed.[6] The federal government is happy to outsource this work to the private prison industry: over 90 percent of people in immigration detention are housed in facilities owned or managed by for-profit entities in 2023.[7] GEO group's contracts with ICE total 43 percent of its revenues and CoreCivic's contracts total 30 percent of its revenue.[8] Both groups also hold transportation contracts with the federal government, which is likely to increase over the next four years. George Zoley, the GEO Group Executive Chairman, explicitly stated on November 7th, 2024, that "[t]he GEO Group was built for this unique moment in our . . . country's history and the opportunities that it will bring."[9] To be clear, the "unique moment" means the Trump administration's inhumane and illegal mass deportation scheme and thirst to grow mass incarceration, and the "opportunity" means profiting billions of dollars from immense human suffering.[10] These companies openly admit that their entire business model depends on locking up more and more people.

Profit, rather than rehabilitation, is the goal of for-profit prisons. These companies will do anything to make more money. Private prisons are often more resistant to sending people who are incarcerated in their facilities to the hospital for medical care.

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[4] *Id.*
[5] Shane Bauer, *The True History of America's Private Prison Industry*, Time (Sept. 25, 2018), https://time.com/5405158/the-true-history-of-americas-private-prison-industry/.
[6] *What Trump's Victory Means for the Private Prison Industry*, BRENNAN CENTER FOR JUSTICE (Nov. 25, 2024), https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/what-trumps-victory-means-private-prison-industry.
[7] *Id.*
[8] *Id.*
[9] *Id.*
[10] *Id.*

One undercover reporter met a man incarcerated by CoreCivic "who lost his legs to gangrene after begging for months for medical care."[11] Educational programs, which are linked to lower rates of recidivism, are gutted to save a buck. Correctional officers in some facilities are paid as little as "$9 an hour and oftentimes there were no more than 24 on duty, armed with nothing but radios, to run a prison of more than 1,500 inmates."[12] In a four-month period in 2015, CoreCivic reported finding more than 200 weapons, *twenty-three times more weapons found in the state's maximum security prison*.[13] The same undercover reporter knew a person "who committed suicide after repeatedly going on hunger strike to demand mental health services in a prison with only one part-time psychologist. When he died, he weighed 71 pounds."[14] A 2016 study by the Department of Justice confirmed what the undercover reporter experienced: private prisons are consistently more violent than public prisons, an environment that is already extremely violent.[15] When the undercover reporter was undergoing training to become corrections officers with CoreCivic, they "were taught that, if we saw inmates stab each other, we were not to intervene. 'We are not going to pay you that much,' one instructor told us. . . . 'If them fools want to cut each other,' the instructor said, 'well, happy cutting.'"[16] Children are also incarcerated in for-profit prison facilities. A chilling and notable example is the kids for cash scandal, where two Pennsylvania judges received financial kickbacks totaling $2.6 million in exchange for imposing harsh sentences on *children* in order to increase occupancy at a private prison operated by PA Child Care.[17] Thousands of children's lives were destroyed by this scheme.

It is patently unconscionable to allow private prisons to own, operate, or manage state correctional facilities in Connecticut. Senate Bill 1328 is a vital, preventative bill that would limit the ability of the for-profit prison industry to operate in this state.

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[11] Bauer, *supra* note 5.
[12] *Id.*
[13] *Id.*
[14] *Id.*
[15] *Id.*
[16] *Id.*
[17] *Luzerne "Kids for Cash" Scandal*, JUVENILE LAW CENTER (accessed Mar. 26, 2025), https://jlc.org/luzerne-kids-cash-scandal.

Private, for-profit prisons are even more shielded from accountability than our public state-run prisons, which are rife with problems. The racial disparities in Connecticut's prisons are among the worst in the country: we detain Black youth ten times more than white youth. Only five states are worse than us when it comes to disproportionately incarcerating Black adults, and only seven states are worse than Connecticut when it comes to disproportionately imprisoning Latine adults.[18] Connecticut already budgets more money for its prison and jail system than its public health department, DMV, anti-discrimination agency, and more.[19] This money should be spent building up, not further harming, people who are incarcerated and their communities. Investment, not incarceration, is how we set people up for success and improve safety. As such, the ACLU-CT strongly supports Senate Bill 1328, and encourages this Committee to do the same.

[18] *See Smart Justice*, ACLU-CT (accessed Mar. 26, 2026), https://www.acluct.org/en/issues/smart-justice.
[19] *Id.*