



NEWS RELEASE

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Prison transparency to be axed along with inspection committee

Westerville – Leaders of the largest state employees union are baffled why Ohio’s state legislature would all but eliminate the only oversight the state has of Ohio’s 26 state-run prisons and two private prisons. Yesterday, the Ohio House of Representatives began fast-tracking an amendment to nix the Correctional Institutional Inspection Committee.

“During a time of massive system changes, record overcrowding and violence against staff, it doesn’t make sense to lessen oversight. If anything, the state should be beefing up its supervision of the agency,” said Christopher Mabe, president of the Ohio Civil Service Employees Association, the union representing most prison employees.

Within the last four years, the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction has changed its management structure, created a three-tier system of inmate classifications, privatized food service, significantly expanded community corrections and now has announced it will close ten prison farms and sell the land.

The CIIC already relies on DR&Cs own figures for much of its reporting, but the process of random inmate surveys has allowed the committee to give important insight into the effectiveness of DR&C’s inmate programming, medical care, food service and safety.

“The CIIC committee is one of the only things that’s been standing in the way of this state agency having no accountability. What’s next, getting rid of Ohio’s sunshine laws?” asked Mabe.

The union believes the work of the committee has specifically helped open the window on the Aramark food service contract, prison violence and the widespread problems with Ohio’s private prisons. “Without the CIIC’s surveys of inmates regarding food service and its reports on violence, no one would know how bad it really is,” said Shawn Gruber, a Correction Officer and president of OCSEA’s Corrections Assembly.

The move to reduce oversight will also be a boon to private prison companies that have long wished to operate in darkness. “Eliminating the CIIC means companies like Corrections Corporation of America will have a free pass to reduce security staff, cherry pick inmates and, in general, violate their contract with the State of Ohio,” Gruber said.

In 2013, when CCA took over the Lake Erie private prison, it was plagued by drugs, violence and contraband. “It was stakeholders like the CIIC that helped shine a light on that disastrous takeover,” Mabe explains.

“Doing this at the eleventh hour without stakeholder input is underhanded and wrong. It shows us that it clearly does not have the support of the majority of DR&C stakeholders or Ohio taxpayers,” said Mabe.

“This will only further erode the transparency of an administration that has not been forthcoming to begin with,” said Mabe.

OCSEA represents approximately 30,000 state and local government employees who work in a wide range of security, regulatory, administrative, direct care, maintenance, customer service and other positions. OCSEA represents 8,600 employees in DR&C. For more information, contact Sally Meckling, 614-865-2602 or 614-404-3881 (cell).