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CUTTING CORNERS IN AMERICA'S CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

How Corrections Companies Harm Prisoners and the Public in Pursuit of Profit





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This brief is part of In the Public Interest's Programs Not Profits campaign.

Each year, the private corrections industry collects hundreds of millions of dollars in profits from taxpayers. To strengthen safety and justice in our communities, we should invest that money in improving and expanding treatment and rehabilitation programs. Programs Not Profits is a multi-year campaign that promotes replacing private profits that hurt incarcerated people, correctional officers, and taxpayers, with publicly funded and managed programs that provide job training, mental health care, and substance abuse treatment. Follow along and get involved at: www.programsnotprofits.org.

Introduction

Today, private corrections companies hold contracts to operate hundreds of prisons, jails, and detention centers.¹ Corrections companies also hold contracts to provide services, such as healthcare and meal preparation, to private and public correctional facilities.

Often times, companies win these contracts by claiming that they will manage the service in ways that are more "efficient" than the government. Some companies also claim that they can reduce the costs to taxpayers. However, in an effort to provide the service with fewer resources while also maximizing profits, companies often cut corners, reducing the quality, effectiveness, and accessibility of the service.

Our review of outsourcing at correctional facilities found that private corrections companies – often under the guise of cost savings – cut corners in the following ways:

- Failing to hire a sufficient number of correctional officers to ensure the safety of prisoners;
- Failing to hire a sufficient number of health care professionals to provide for prisoners' medical needs;
- Lowering the compensation paid to correctional officers and kitchen staff;
- Hiring poorly qualified halfway house staff;
- · Reducing the trainings for correctional officers and kitchen staff;
- Neglecting facility maintenance and equipment; and
- · Lowering the quality and healthiness of the food.

By cutting corners, corrections companies harm prisoners, employees, communities, and taxpayers. At Idaho Correctional Center prison, instead of hiring correctional officers, Corrections Corporation of America purposely relinquished control of the facility to prison gangs, according to a lawsuit filed by prisoners. In Minnesota, from 1998 to 2013, 30 prisoners either died or suffered severe injuries after

CORRECTIONS COMPANIES THAT CUT CORNERS REAP LARGE PROFITS

Corrections companies have reaped profits by cutting corners in ways that reduce their spending on services. While the exact profits achieved by companies on the specific contracts studied in this brief are not known, the companies have reported millions of dollars in profits earned annually from overall operations. From 2012 to 2014, CCA and GEO Group, which earn revenue almost exclusively from corrections contracts, reported \$653 million and \$434 million in profits, respectively.² (The profits Aramark and Corizon earned from corrections contracts are unknown.³) In 2014 alone, CCA awarded \$234 million in dividends to its shareholders, equivalent to \$3,366 per prisoner in its facilities.⁴ GEO Group awarded \$170 million in dividends, equivalent to \$2,771 per prisoner in its facilities.⁵

Corizon, the health care company for the state's prisons, denied or delayed needed medical care. In Michigan, Aramark, the company that cooked meals for the state's prisons, reduced its labor costs by hiring low-skilled employees at low wages who couriered contraband, engaged in intimate relations with prisoners, hired prisoners to assault others, and acted in other ways counter to prisoner safety and rehabilitation.

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The following brief discusses these case studies and others to illustrate how corrections companies cut corners in ways that result in the provision of low-quality services and ultimately harm the overall public good.

CASE STUDY 1: IDAHO

Corrections Corporation of America Cuts Correctional Officers and Safety Equipment

n 1997, the Idaho Department of Correction (IDOC) finished construction of the Idaho Correctional Center – a new 2,080-person prison south of Boise – and granted management to Corrections Corporation of America (CCA).⁶

CCA lowered its operating costs and increased its profits by cutting corners on staffing, hiring fewer correctional officers than needed for a prison of that size. Investigations in the past few years have uncovered a history of staff shortages, with important security posts left continually unfilled. In 2013, CCA admitted to falsifying records that hid 4,800 hours of uncovered shifts during a seven-month period



in the previous year – equivalent to the time that would have been worked by four full-time correctional officers.⁷ According to an IDOC audit, CCA understaffed the facility by as many as 26,000 hours in 2012 – equivalent to the time that would have been worked by 13 full-time correctional officers.⁸ A federal judge found CCA in contempt of court for hiding information on the falsified hours.⁹



A lawsuit filed in 2012 on behalf of Idaho Correctional Center's prisoners contends that, in order to hire fewer correctional officers and reduce spending, CCA relinquished control of the facility to prison gangs, leading to violence and serious prisoner injuries.¹⁰ Another lawsuit filed on behalf of prisoners in 2010 contends that understaffing contributed to high levels of violence, which earned the prison the nickname "gladiator school."¹¹

CCA's understaffing decisions also put the correctional officers who were working at the facility at risk. According to Sargent Leonard King, a former CCA employee who is suing the company, one night time guard was expected to oversee 250-300 prisoners, which jeopardized the correctional officers' safety. King was assaulted five times before leaving the company. In addition, CCA supplied their correctional officers with empty cans of pepper spray and broken radios and told them "to just fake it" when needed.¹²

In February 2014, CCA paid \$1 million in penalties for understaffing the prison.¹³ Five months later, the Department of Correction ended its contract with CCA and assumed management of the facility.¹⁴

CASE STUDY 2: OHIO

Corrections Corporation of America Cuts Investments in Staff

n December 2011, Ohio sold the Lake Erie Correctional Facility to CCA and then contracted with the company to manage the incarceration of its 1,800 prisoners. ¹⁵ The facility management contract was designed to save the state \$3 million annually. ¹⁶

When CCA won the contract, it laid off experienced, unionized employees.¹⁷ The company also instituted pay cuts, which likely contributed to a high turnover rate of 20 percent.¹⁸



Since then, CCA has failed to hire and train new staff to meet the needs of the prison. More than a year after the start of the contract, for example, CCA had yet to fill positions for a vocational instructor and nurse practitioner.¹⁹ Many of the new employees, according to a review by the Correctional Institution Inspection Committee (CIIC), lacked the training and experience to maintain order in the facility.²⁰ In 2012, the state deducted \$573,000 from CCA's disbursements due to low staffing levels and other contract violations.²¹

With a shortage of qualified staff, violence plagued the prison. CIIC found that between 2010 and 2012 (before and after the prison was privatized), prisoner-on-prisoner assaults increased 188 percent, and prisoner-on-staff assaults increased 306 percent.²² CIIC also found that CCA's employees used unnecessary physical force and failed to sanction prisoners for misconduct.²³ In addition, prisoner complaints about gangs, assaults, and other problems doubled after CCA began managing the facility.²⁴

Understaffing allowed the contraband market to flourish. The low number of security officers, paired with a shortage of cameras and equipment, left the prisoners inadequately supervised, and accomplices from outside would routinely throw contraband over the facility's fences to prisoners waiting inside.²⁵ According to a released prisoner, "heroin was like it was legal in there" and could be delivered to prisoners' bed sides. An audit from January 2013 reported that a heroin overdose was the likely cause of death for one prisoner.²⁶ More than 35 percent of prisoners reported that procuring drugs was "easy."²⁷

The contraband couriers increased crime in the surrounding town of Conneaut. In 2012 – the first year of CCA management – the police received 229 calls related to the prison, which is almost four times more than the previous five years combined, straining the resources of the police department.²⁸

CORRECTIONS COMPANIES CUT CORNERS ON STAFF RETENTION AND DEVELOPMENT

Corrections companies often cut corners in ways that leave their employees less trained than their public sector counterparts.

Many corrections companies cut costs by reducing employee wages. Industry wage data show that in 2015, correctional officers employed by private prisons earned a median annual salary of \$32,290. By comparison, the median annual salary for correctional officers employed by federal, state, and local governments was \$41,160.²⁹

The low wages can cause employees to leave their jobs in search of other, higher-paying work. In West Virginia, for example, where 48 percent of state prison correctional officers quit within their first year, exit interviews have shown that most leave as a result of low salaries.³⁰

Once the corrections companies hire new employees, the companies cut corners on training and onboarding. A 2004 article in the Federal Probation Journal found that, on average, correctional officers employed by private companies undergo 174 hours of pre-service training. Public sector officers, on the other hand, are required to undergo 232 hours of pre-service training, 58 hours more than their private sector counterparts.³¹

As a result of corrections companies cutting these corners, many of their employees lack the know-how to create a safe environment. In addition, correctional officers with low wages and little training are more at risk of becoming contraband couriers.³²

CASE STUDY 3: FLORIDA

Corrections Corporation of America Cuts Jail Maintenance



When Corrections Corporation of America (CCA) managed Hernando County's jail, north of Tampa, Florida, the company cut corners by neglecting routine building maintenance, jeopardizing safety at the facility. CCA failed to repair rusted doors, replace damaged windows, seal cracks in the walls and floors, fix damaged ceiling tiles, and patch leaks in the roof, even though maintaining the facility was a requirement in its agreement with the county.³³ (See picture.) When the sheriff's office assumed management of the facility in 2010, the county commissioned a report that found CCA responsible for roughly

\$1 million in deferred maintenance costs.34

"If [CCA] had performed routine maintenance as they [sic] should have and as their [sic] contract required," said Major Michael Page who led the sheriff's office take-over of the jail, "this building would look 10 times better." The county withheld CCA's final payment of \$1.86 million for failing to perform the maintenance that was required by the contract, and CCA sued in response. 36

The county and CCA settled the case in 2012 for \$100,000, forcing the county taxpayers to cover the outstanding maintenance costs.³⁷



Rusted door at Hernando County Jail. Reprinted with permission of The Tampa Bay Times. All Rights Reserved.

CASE STUDY 4: MISSISSIPPI

GEO Group Cuts Correctional Officers, Training, and Facility Maintenance

n August 2010, GEO Group began management of the East Mississippi Correctional Facility and cut corners by underinvesting in staffing, training, resources, and equipment.³⁸ These decisions jeopardized the safety of prison staff, who suffered severe injuries from prisoner attacks, including stabs, bites, and head trauma. In December 2011, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) investigated the facility and cited GEO Group for numerous workplace violations. Specifically:

GEO Group did not employ a sufficient number of correctional officers to prevent
assaults from prisoners. For example, one of the housing units that required eight
correctional officers was staffed by only three.³⁹ OSHA's review specifically cited low
staff levels as reasons for prisoner attacks on correctional officers.⁴⁰

- GEO Group's neglect of building maintenance created unsafe conditions for both prisoners and correctional officers. Cell doors with broken locks could not be opened by correctional officers from outside, but could be opened by prisoners from inside.⁴¹
- OSHA found that GEO Group had not trained their correctional officers in basic self-defense.⁴²

In total, OSHA fined GEO Group more than \$100,000 for workplace violations. OSHA concluded that the company either knew its decisions were in violation of the law or had "plain indifference to worker safety and health." OSHA also cited GEO Group for three "serious" violations, meaning that OSHA found "substantial probability that death or serious physical harm from a hazard about which the employer knew or should have known."⁴³

In 2012, GEO Group ended the contract citing financial underperformance.⁴⁴

CASE STUDY 5: CALIFORNIA

Community Education Centers Cuts Qualifications for Staff at Halfway House

n 2010, Community Education Centers (CEC) operated a residential reentry center, or "halfway house," in Long Beach for the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR). According to Richard Ortega, the facility's director at the time, CEC cut corners by employing unqualified staff. For



example, the center's clinical director lacked a college degree, which was inadequate to manage the treatment of the more than 100 residents.⁴⁵ CEC also compensated the clinical director roughly \$13 to \$14 per hour, approximately 64 percent less than the wages of similar jobs in California.⁴⁶

An audit conducted by CDCR in December 2010 cited CEC for a litany of problems stemming from a lack of supervision, many that prevented residents' rehabilitation. At night, residents would scale the fences, travel to liquor stores, and buy drugs. During the day, residents would then fail drug tests, but CEC officials would discourage the facility staff from evicting them. "It was a mess," according to Ortega. 47 However, the lack of

trained staff prevented Ortega from fixing the problems uncovered by the state's auditors.⁴⁸

Audits conducted by HealthRight, the nonprofit that oversaw CEC's facility on behalf of the state, also reported problems that prevented rehabilitation. Auditors found that residents engaged in drug use, alcohol consumption, and violence, and that CEC provided inadequate mental health services and failed to keep proper records. In 2012, HealthRight did not renew CEC's contract for the facility.⁴⁹

CASE STUDY 6: PENNSYLVANIA

Corizon Cuts Medical Staff

n September 2013, Corizon Correctional Healthcare began a contract with Allegheny County in Pennsylvania to provide health care at a Pittsburgh jail. Since then, Corizon has cut corners and



increased profits by reducing the number of medical staff at the facility. For example, the company downsized from 4.5 physicians – as employed by the previous non-profit health care provider — to 1.5 physicians. ⁵⁰ According to an audit by the Allegheny Controller six months into the contract, Corizon staffed 78 percent of its shifts below the required minimum. The understaffing averaged 50.5 hours per day, equal to more than six of the required 47 employees assuming 8-hour shifts. ⁵¹

The jail's medical care has been plagued with problems stemming from understaffing. According to the Controller's audit:

- For 32 percent of prisoners who needed medical care when they entered the facility, Corizon either failed to provide the care or provided the care but failed to keep a record.⁵²
- Corizon either failed to examine or failed to record exams for 23 percent of new prisoners. (Corizon
 must give physical exams to prisoners incarcerated in the jail for more than 14 days.) Corizon
 provided exams for 60 percent of the prisoners outside the 14-day window.⁵³
- Corizon either failed to evaluate or failed to record evaluations on the medical and mental health of 83 percent of prisoners before they spent time in solitary confinement.⁵⁴
- Corizon failed to provide prisoners with re-entry health services. For example, for 71 percent
 of prisoners in need of medication, Corizon either failed to provide the medication or failed to
 document that it provided the medication when the prisoner left the facility.⁵⁵



According to the audit, these problems were "most likely attributable at least in part to Corizon's failure to apply adequate personnel resources to the provision of inmate healthcare services."56

Corizon's negligent medical care has had dire and fatal consequences for prisoners. In one instance, a man who entered the jail over a weekend died when Corizon forced him to wait for anti-seizure medication until Monday, according to his attorney. In total, seven prisoners at Allegheny County Jail died in 2014 – double the national jail average on a per-person basis.⁵⁷

CASE STUDY 7: IDAHO

Corizon Cuts Mental Health Services

orizon Correctional Healthcare provides for the medical care of prisoners at the Idaho State Correctional Institution (ISCI), a 1,688-bed facility for long-term sentences south of Boise.⁵⁸ Amid allegations of medical malfeasance in 2011, a judge ordered an assessment of the prison's health care.⁵⁹ The report, conducted in late 2011 and early 2012, reprimanded Corizon for its business practices, declaring the medical treatment of its prisoners as "cruel and unusual" and unconstitutional.⁶⁰



The report found that Corizon did not hire sufficient psychiatric staff to meet the prisoners' mental health needs. Corizon employed the equivalent of one full-time psychiatrist and one part-time psychiatrist (working 10 hours per week) to provide care for 474 prisoners on psychotropic medication.⁶¹ According to the American Psychiatric Association's standards for prisons, Corizon should have employed at least three to six full-time psychiatrists.⁶²

As a result of cutting corners on hiring psychiatrists, Corizon also cut corners on the provision of mental health care. Corizon prescribed psychotropic drugs to prisoners with conditions that should have been treated with therapy. Corizon provided an insufficient

number of weekly sessions to prisoners attending group therapy. Corizon also failed to keep up-to-date mental health records for the prisoners.⁶³

The court's report concluded that "the psychiatrist cannot be expected to have enough time to safely evaluate and treat patients." In one instance, the court's doctors found that a prisoner, admitted to the infirmary for a harmful reaction to antipsychotic medication, had not been evaluated by a psychiatrist in the 14 days since his admittance. As a result, Corizon forced the prisoner to suffer the two weeks in a catatonic state. The court's report also uncovered that Corizon used mentally ill prisoners instead of staff to monitor other sick prisoners at risk of suicide.

CASE STUDY 8: ARIZONA

Wexford Cuts Pharmaceutical Services

n July 2012, Wexford Health Sources assumed management of medical care for Arizona's 40,000 prisoners in a state-wide three-year \$349 million contract.⁶⁶



State audits conducted less than two months into the contract found that Wexford cut corners on providing for prisoners' medication needs. Staff members knowingly administered expired medications to prisoners across the state but took no actions to fix the problem, according to the company's corporate pharmacist.⁶⁷

State audits also discovered that Wexford was potentially failing to provide prisoners with their prescribed medications due to problems with expired prescriptions and refills. After the Arizona Department of Corrections (ADC) informed Wexford of the problem, the company failed to deploy the necessary staff resources in a timely manner to check that

prisoners were receiving proper medications. To check whether Wexford was administering the correct drugs, ADC staff were forced to step in and review the medical records themselves. Around the same time, a prisoner at the correctional facility in Florence hanged himself with a sheet after not receiving his psychotropic medication for 23 days.⁶⁸

In total, the state audits cited Wexford for 20 contract violations. In addition to the aforementioned medication issues, the citations included a "quantitative decrease in routine institutional care" and "staffing levels [that created] inappropriate schedule gaps in on-site medical coverage." 69

As a result of the audits, ADC also fined Wexford \$10,000 for exposing approximately 100 prisoners to hepatitis C when a nurse reused a dirty syringe to administer insulin.⁷⁰

In yet another instance of Wexford cutting corners, a recent report by the American Friends Service Committee revealed that Wexford denied a senior needed surgery. When a 69-year-old prisoner developed a hernia in his testicular sac and his testicle swelled to the size of a grapefruit, cutting off circulation, hospital doctors prescribed surgery. However, Wexford denied the procedure in an attempt to avoid paying for the operation's costs. 71 ADC ended its contract with Wexford in January 2013, after which the prisoner was able to receive the surgery. 72

CASE STUDY 9: MICHIGAN

Aramark Cuts Kitchen Employee Compensation and Training

n December 2013, the Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC) signed a three-year \$145 million contract with Aramark to feed the state's 43,000 prisoners.⁷³ The deal was estimated to save the state between \$36 million and \$48 million over three years.⁷⁴



Upon taking over food services from the state, Aramark immediately lowered its operating costs by cutting kitchen workers' compensation in half to about \$11 per hour and ceasing some safety trainings. Tonsequently, the new, less-qualified employees violated security rules, broke the law, and acted in ways counter to prisoner rehabilitation. They couriered in contraband – such as marijuana – and engaged in intimate relations with the prisoners, which included exchanging love letters, kissing, and fellatio. According to a letter from MDOC to Aramark in February 2014, Aramark employees are inadequately trained and have a lack of tool control, specifically knives and a whisk, which is very dangerous as these items have come up missing.

attempting to hire a prisoner to arrange an assault on another prisoner.⁷⁸ In total, from March 2014 to October 2014, MDOC cited Aramark for 485 instances of jeopardizing prisoner safety and facility security, according to an analysis by Progress Michigan.⁷⁹

In the first seven months of Aramark's contract, 74 employees were banned from Michigan's prisons.⁸⁰ By comparison, in the five years before Aramark's contract – when public employees provided food services for the prisons – about five workers were banned.⁸¹

The state has also cited Aramark for unsanitary conditions, food shortages, and unauthorized food substitutions.⁸² For example, at Cooper Street Correctional Facility south of Lansing, Aramark replaced four ounces of sausage with three ounces of hot dogs, failed to clean caked food off of floor mixers, and cooked vegetables without washing them first.⁸³ From March 2014 to October 2014, Progress Michigan found that MDOC cited Aramark for 2,945 food quality and sanitation issues.⁸⁴

The state fined the company \$98,000 in March 2014 and \$200,000 in August for contract violations.⁸⁵ In July 2015, the state terminated the contract.⁸⁶

CASE STUDY 10: FLORIDA

Aramark Cuts Food Quality and Healthiness

rom July 2001 to January 2009, Aramark held the food service contract for most of Florida's correctional facilities.⁸⁷ The Florida Department of Corrections' (FDOC) stated goal in signing the contract was "to reduce its administrative and personnel costs by consolidating food service operations with a single contractor."⁸⁸



Aramark lowered costs and profited by cutting corners on the quality and healthiness of the food. The company reduced spices and fillers. The water in which vegetables were cooked and grease from meat were considered part of the servings. ⁸⁹ A 2007 audit by FDOC concluded that "service levels [had] deteriorated both in relative quantity and in quality."

Aramark also replaced turkey breast with "turkey ends and pieces" and removed beef almost entirely from the menu, often cooking the turkey instead. The FDOC audit found that replacing beef (which cost \$1.50 per pound) with turkey (which cost \$0.57 per pound) reduced Aramark's operating costs by \$4.9 million annually.⁹¹



Some of this "less palatable food," according to the FDOC audit, directly violated the agreed-upon menu when the contract was signed. During the request for proposal period, Aramark explicitly asked, "may ground turkey be used to replace ground beef in recipes," to which the Department of Corrections responded, "No. If the recipe specifies ground beef, then ground beef must be used."

The decline in food quality accompanied a drop in the number of prisoners eating meals. From January 2001 to May 2006, the percent of prisoners attending each meal fell from 90 percent to 82 percent on average. The FDOC audit found that, "It is likely that the substitution of less costly and less palatable food products is at least partially responsible for decreasing inmate meal participation rates." 93

The drop in meal attendance and the replacement of beef with turkey had a significant impact on padding the company's bottom line. These cut corners allowed Aramark to save \$10.5 million in operating costs during fiscal year 2005-06.⁹⁴

Endnotes

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- ¹⁴ Kimberlee Kruesi, "State Takeover of Private Prison on Track," *KBOI2, 19 June 2014*.
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- ¹⁹ Chris Kirkham, "Lake Erie Correctional Institution, Ohio Private Prison, Faces Concerns About 'Unacceptable' Conditions," *The Huffington Post*, 2 February 2013.
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- $^{27}\,\text{Sara Shookman, "Prison Problems at Conneaut's Lake Erie Correctional," WKYC, 3\,December 2013.$
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- ⁴² Ibid.
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- ⁴⁵ Anat Rubin, "A Record of Trouble," *The Marshall Project*, 11 April 2015.
- ⁴⁶ Probation Officers and Correctional Treatment Specialists earned a mean hourly wage of \$37.05: United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Occupational Employment Statistics: May 2010 State Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates: California," downloaded from www.bls.gov/oes/2010/may/oes_ca.htm, 17 November 2015. To the best of In the Public Interest's knowledge, the job description for "Probation Officers and Correctional Treatment Specialists" as defined by the Bureau of Labor Statistic's Standard Occupational Classification most aptly fits the responsibilities of the clinical director at CEC's Long Beach facility. Probation Officers and Correctional Treatment Specialists "provide social services to assist in rehabilitation of law offenders in custody or on probation or parole. Make recommendations for actions involving formulation of rehabilitation plan and treatment of offender, including conditional release and education and employment stipulations": United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Standard Occupational Classification: 21-1092 Probation Officers and Correctional Treatment Specialists," downloaded from www.bls.gov/soc/2010/soc211092.htm, 17 November 2015.

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- ⁵⁶ Ibid.
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- ⁵⁸ Idaho Department of Correction, "Idaho State Correctional Institution (ISCI)," downloaded from www.idoc.idaho.gov/content/locations/prisons/idaho_state_correctional_institution, 27 August 2015.
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- 61 lbid. The report states "Currently... psychiatric staffing is 1.25 FTE." 10 hours per week" is derived from assuming that a full-time psychiatrist works 40 hours per week.
- 62 Ibid. The report states, "APA states that for every 75-150 inmate-patients with SMI who are receiving psychotropic medication, there should be 1.0 FTE psychiatrist or equivalent. Using this metric, and assuming there are 474 medicated SMI patients, ISCI should have between 3.2 and 6.3 FTE psychiatric staffing."
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- 94 lbid. \$10.5 million was derived from summing \$5.6 million (the cost savings from the decrease in meal attendance for fiscal year 2005-06) and \$4.9 million (the annual cost savings from replacing ground beef with ground turkey).



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