



Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition (MPAC)
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Maine prisoner advocates voice strong opposition to private prisons

AUGUSTA -- The Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition and others expressed grave concern Monday over the potential construction of a private prison in Milo, a small town about 40 miles northwest of Bangor.

M-PAC members, as well the Maine Civil Liberties Union and other state leaders and social agencies, also are concerned that Gov.-elect Paul LePage, in a very misguided effort to save money, would consider contracting to send Maine prisoners out of state.

LePage this week met with Milo officials who consider a private prison an opportunity to create jobs and boost the town's economy. Joining in the talks were officials from the Tennessee-based Corrections Corp. of America, which was previously unsuccessful with the Baldacci administration to move Maine prisoners out of state.

Judy Garvey, an M-PAC spokesperson, noted on Friday that CCA had contributed \$25,000 to the LePage campaign for governor and questioned the company's motives, as well as the purpose of LePage in even considering such an ill-advised change to Maine's corrections system.

"M-PAC is hopeful that Gov.-elect LePage would come up with innovative and less expensive plans to ease prison budgets, rather than using taxpayers' money to recycle the same old failed ideas from the last administration," Garvey said.

She pointed to an expose of the Tennessee private prison company by the Portland Phoenix, which documented numerous lawsuits filed against the company by various states for its handling of prisoners.

Jim Schatz, a former state legislator and member of the Criminal Justice Committee, has long opposed the idea of for-profit prisons. "I really think that's a sad form of economic development."

"We need to figure out ways to reduce the prison population, not to find more rooms,"

Shatz said. "Investment should instead be made to enroll more people in community substance abuse programs, for example."

Alysia Melnick of the Public Policy Council of the MCLU, agreed. "Private prisons lack transparency and accountability and this has led, across the country, to serious human rights abuses," Melnick said.

"Because private prisons are profit driven, they inevitably act in ways counter to society's primary reasons for incarceration -- deterrence and rehabilitation," she added. "For the sake of prisoners and our communities, it is crucial that prisons continue to be under state control."

The American Correctional Officer Intelligence Association debunked myths about towns' economic upswings where CCA prisons are located in *Private Prison Media Reports, Review #17*: "After a sordid 20-year history there is no proof that supports these contentions."

Maine law wisely prohibits prisoners from being housed in for-profit prisons, regardless of where they are located. A private prison in Milo would require the approval of the Legislature, which Maine prison reform advocates hope lawmakers will swiftly reject.

For more information, visit M-PAC's website: www.maineprisoneradvocacy.org.

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