

Policy on Privatization of Corrections

- ISSUE:** Whether SLSC supports the privatization of corrections
- GOAL:** To ensure that Canadian governments fund research and experience-based programs that truly promote safer communities and appropriate sentencing of offenders.
- BACKGROUND:** After careful examination of the research and experience of privatized corrections across North America, we recognize the need for a policy statement with regard to privatized corrections that is in keeping with our Mission and guiding principles

We find a clear distinction between private and 'for profit' corrections and the private 'not for profit' sector. While St. Leonard's Society of Canada affiliates fall under the latter category, this policy statement relates to the proposed growth in Canada of private 'for profit' corrections facilities.

As a business, the private 'for profit' corrections facility has a responsibility to make a profit for its shareholders. This can produce divided loyalties for the business owner who must devise ways in which to make this profit, which can result in poorly trained, under-paid staff and/or poor physical plant structures. Such 'scrimping' to achieve a profit can, in turn, create dangerous situations for both inmates and staff of such an institution.

The only other way for a private 'for profit' corrections provider to make a profit is through the economies of scale that a larger operation can generate. More and bigger prisons need more incarcerated offenders to keep them full and making a profit. At a time when both research and a wealth of US experience demonstrates clearly that incarcerating more people produced neither a deterrent effect on crime nor an increase feeling of community safety, any move on the part of a government to allow for the proliferation of prisons is clearly counter-productive.

We believe that the role a government plays in funding private 'for profit' corrections presents a number of problems with privatization. It is a duty of government to create laws and penalties for breaking these laws, up to and including incarceration. Offenders in a democratic society are both subject to and protected by these same laws. The question arises, then, whether it is appropriate for a government to allow offenders to be incarcerated in publicly-funded private 'for profit' prisons, knowing that the profit motive may create unsafe situations for prisoners and the community

The placement of private 'for profit' prisons raises the issue of a government's true goal in funding such facilities. For example, often private 'for profit' prisons appear in economically depressed geographical areas. While the majority of offenders within them are likely to be from urban areas, they are incarcerated in rural areas. The public should

question whether the government's prime purpose in funding privatization is job creation in these depressed areas or its mandate to provide offender sentencing appropriate to the crimes committed.

We further believe that Canada does not need more prisons. The separation of offenders from their communities through incarceration should be saved for the most serious offences. The wealth of research-based interventions available to address criminogenic behaviour through the voluntary and private 'not for profit' sectors should be more extensively used to produce the desired results: deterrence, community safety, and the rehabilitation of offenders. Rather than allowing governments to abrogate their duties in relation to community safety by assigning them to private 'for profit' providers, the public must hold elected officials responsible for building social capital.

RESOLVED THAT:

The St. Leonard's Society of Canada calls on federal and provincial governments of Canada to create policies which discourage the privatization for profit of community justice services and in particular, the privatization for profit of prisons and community corrections. The St. Leonard's Society of Canada urges the governments of Canada to promote through policy and practice the role and function of research based not-for profit programs which reduce crime and create safer communities.

Adopted at the Annual General Meeting, May 29, 1999.