St. Leonard's Society of Canada | Société St-Léonard du Canada
211 Bronson Avenue, Suite 208, Ottawa, ON K1R 6H5
613.233.5170 | info@stleonards.ca | www.stleonards.ca
Registered charitable organization | organisme de bienfaisance reconnu # 12894 6829 RR0001

Name of Policy: Privatization of Corrections

Revised Policy Adoption Date: *SLSC Annual General Meeting, Calgary, AB, June 4, 2026.*
Historical Policy Adoption Date: *SLSC Annual General Meeting, Ottawa, ON, May 29, 1999.*

Purpose Statement: The purpose of St. Leonard's Society of Canada (SLSC) is to promote humane and informed criminal and social justice policy, practice, and responsible leadership to foster safer communities. We achieve this by:

a. supporting our members;
b. conducting research and developing policy;
c. advocating for and applying evidence-based approaches; and,
d. advancing collaborative relationships and communication.

Purpose of SLSC Policies: Policies of SLSC are developed in collaboration with affiliate agencies, SLSC's Board of Directors and members, and are ratified at the Annual General Meeting with the express purposes of:

- identifying criminal justice and related issues relevant to its membership;
- reflecting SLSC organizational values and social justice goals;
- articulating SLSC approaches, practices and standards to achieve these goals; and,
- ensuring the good governance of SLSC on matters of legal, administrative and organizational relevance.

Background:
In 1999, SLSC issued a policy on the privatization of prisons because of concern for the introduction of private for-profit correctional facilities, and how they would undermine habilitation, public safety, and accountability. Since SLSC's original policy, Canada has not adopted widespread, complete privatization of prisons; however, elements of privatization have continued to emerge through contracted services, such as food, communication, and other necessary operational supports.[1] Though facilities remain publicly administered, the growth of privatized service delivery suggests a broader trend toward the privatization of corrections that merit reflection,[2] particularly in light of operational budget reductions within government correctional systems.[3]

The privatization of corrections has been defined in numerous ways, leading to ambiguity regarding its scope.[4] For the purpose of this policy, privatization refers to *government agencies and institutions contracting out services and operations to external, non-profit, or for-profit companies*.[5] Non-profit organizations operate for purposes other than profit, such as social welfare, civic improvement, and

[1] Buitenhuis, A. (2013) Public-private partnerships and prison expansion in Ontario: Shifts in governance 1995 to 2012 (Unpublished MA thesis). University of Toronto, Toronto.
[2] McElligott, G. (2017). Invested in Prisons: Prison Expansion and Community Development in Canada. *Studies in Social Justice, 11*(1), 86–112.
[3] For example, see: Correctional Service of Canada Departmental Plan 2026-27. Comprehensive Expenditure Review.
[4] Montes, A. N., & Mears, D.P. (2019). Privatized Corrections in the 21st Century Reframing the Privatization Debate. *Criminology & Public Policy.*
[5] Lindsey, A. M., Mears, D. P., & Cochran, J. C. (2016). The Privatization Debate: A Conceptual Framework for Improving (Public and Private) Corrections. *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice*.

recreation.[6] For-profit corporations are independent agencies that aim to benefit and generate profit for their stakeholders.[7]

In Canada, the *Corrections and Conditional Release Act* (*CCRA*) outlines that the mandate of the federal correctional system is to contribute to public safety through humane custody of individuals and by assisting in their habilitation and integration into the community.[8] While the *CCRA* does not explicitly prohibit private sector involvement, its legislative intent frames incarceration as a public responsibility with clear standards for oversight and the legal rights of justice-involved individuals.

Whereas government-run systems are legislated to uphold the principles of public safety and habilitation, private corporations can often primarily be driven by profit. This significant discrepancy in objectives can conflict with the ultimate purpose of Canada's federal correctional facilities: "to contribute to public safety by encouraging and assisting offenders to become law-abiding citizens, while managing them in a safe, secure, and humane manner".[9]

These concerns are reflected in growing advocacy[10] and policy discussions[11]; however, there is still significantly limited empirical research examining the consequences of privatization within the context of Canadian correctional systems. In particular, it would be helpful to better understand how contracted services and direct service agreements may affect institutional conditions, quality of services, and mechanisms established for accountability. If private sector involvement in correctional services expands through outsourced support, the limited availability of Canadian research makes it difficult to fully evaluate the long-term impacts of these arrangements on habilitative objectives.

Tension extends beyond institutional settings to the outsourcing of community supervision and integration services to non-profit and for-profit organizations, including SLSC, its members, and other service providers across the community corrections sector. Acknowledging this role as part of the broader justice system, it is critical to examine how SLSC and its members can ensure accountability, transparency, consistency of care, and alignment with broader human rights objectives.

Issue/Scope:

The expansion of private sector involvement raises concerns about transparency, accountability mechanisms, and the potential for financial incentives to detract from the legislative purpose and intent of correctional systems. During periods of fiscal restraint, these points of concern become emphasized when spending restrictions are imposed by the government to reduce operating expenditures.[12] Pressures to make decisions within short timelines can exacerbate hasty decision-making, and reductions to public service can result in gaps being filled with private providers who can meet the threshold of the 'lowest bidder'. If the focus is on cutting costs, contracts may go to the lowest bidding companies that can offer the lowest price rather than the best service.

---

[6] Government of Canada. (2025). *Differences Between a Registered Charity and a Non-Profit Organization*.
[7] Nonprofit Law Ontario. (2024). *Different Group Structures*.
[8] *Corrections and Conditional Release Act* (S.C. 1992, c. 20).
[9] Correctional Service Canada. (1989). *Our Mandates*.
[10] Hunt, L. & Ridd, K. (2025). *Following the Money: Cui Bono Report.* Canadian Friends Service Committee.
[11] John Howard Society of Alberta. 1998. *Privatization of Corrections*. Kingston, ON: John Howard Society.
[12] Government of Canada. (2026). *Workforce Reductions in the Federal Public Service*.

A key concern associated with privatization is that the profit motive may be prioritized over the quality of services being provided to justice-involved individuals.[13] The need to maximize profit can result in private for-profit agencies cutting costs in terms of services, staff, and training, ultimately compromising the quality of care being provided.[14] For example, food services in Ontario correctional facilities are privately provided through a cook-chill program.[15] This program reduces costs by serving food that is pre-made, pre-packaged, and heated in facilities.[16] Despite the Ministry of the Solicitor General's Nutritional and Quality Standards policy, which is intended to ensure that the quality of the food is not compromised, individuals in correctional facilities have reported experiences of undercooked, overly processed, and rotten food.[17] These low-cost standardized alternatives reduce costs and maximize profits, often at the expense of the well-being of justice-involved individuals.

The difference in priorities and purpose of for-profit companies raises concerns regarding whether the interests of incarcerated people are being sufficiently considered by private companies. A private company, for example, prioritizes its duty towards its shareholders, often neglecting correctional motives, such as habilitation and integration.[18] Additionally, this can result in a 'standardization' of services to streamline efficiency, although it can result in a loss of consideration for/access to services that prioritize individual and community contexts. This can actively ignore the complexity of the incarcerated population, including sacrificing approaches that address intergenerational trauma and systemic discrimination rooted in colonialism.

While privatization is often justified on the grounds of efficiency and cost-effectiveness, it raises significant concerns regarding equity and culturally grounded principles mandated in Canadian law. In particular, it risks undermining measures called for in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action[19] and the intent of Gladue principles.[20] The impact of the privatization of corrections is not standard or distributed equally to each actor involved; rather, it can disproportionately burden vulnerable groups within the Canadian context, such as Indigenous and other racialized communities, who are overrepresented within the justice system.

Privatization is also associated with the risk of net-widening. Net-widening occurs when programs or processes serve to expand the "net" of control and increase the number of people impacted by criminalization and punishment.[21] Privatizing aspects of corrections can contribute to net-widening when contract timelines

---

[13] Lindsey et al., 2016.
[14] Lindsey et al., 2016.
[15] Struthers, K.M. (2023). The Embodiment of Contempt: Ontario Provincial Prison Food. *Social and Legal Studies.*
[16] *Ibid.*
[17] *Ibid.*
[18] Montes, A. N. (2020). What Are We Talking about When We Talk about Privatization? A Qualitative Assessment of Privatized Corrections. *American Journal of Criminal Justice.*
[19] Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. 2015. *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action*. Winnipeg: Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.
[20] *R. v. Gladue*, 1 S.C.R. 688 (1999).
[21] Cohen, S. (1985). *Visions of social control: Crime, punishment, and classification*. New York, NY, USA; Oxford, UK; Cambridge [Cambridgeshire]: Polity Press.

exceed the needs of a program.[22] In these circumstances, contractual requirements may create pressure for correctional institutions to fill programs with individuals who would not otherwise be required to participate.[23] Additionally, given that for-profit companies prioritize maximizing profit, they may not be invested in positive outcomes for clients, resulting in justice-involved individuals staying in the correctional system for longer.[24] This misalignment in priorities raises concerns regarding whether there is sufficient incentive in place for private companies to provide services that promote habilitation and support individuals in exiting.

Countering these impacts requires distinguishing between privatization that prioritizes monetary returns and private sector involvement that operates as an extension of public interest and aligns with the legislative purpose of correctional institutions. It is important to note that private sector involvement is not inherently problematic. Specifically, privatization within the correctional system can be effective if the needs and well-being of justice-involved individuals are prioritized and there is sufficient oversight to promote accountability and transparency. Ultimately, the core issue is not the presence of private actors (both for-profit and non-profit organizations), but whether their involvement advances or undermines the safety, health, equity, and inclusivity of Canadian communities. Correctional services must remain fundamentally a public responsibility, with any external partnerships strictly aligned with legislative intent and human rights obligations.

Resolutions:

Be it resolved that St. Leonard's Society of Canada advocates against privatization when:

1. the intents (e.g., profit motive) and/or outcomes associated with contracting an external organization do not align with legislative purposes and/or detract from habilitation, accountability, equity, and public safety;
2. there is insufficient oversight to regulate the involvement of external actors; and,
3. contracting with external organizations places a disproportionate burden on justice-involved people (e.g., financial or other).

Additional Information:

SLSC Reports/Publications:

- St. Leonard's Society of Canada. (2025). Policy on Electronic Monitoring.
- St. Leonard's Society of Canada. (2025). Privatization of Corrections Backgrounder.
- St. Leonard's Society of Canada. (2020). Policy on the Role of Government.

External Reports/Publications:

- Hunt, L. & Ridd, K. (2025). *Following the Money: Cui Bono Report.* Canadian Friends Service Committee.
- Kang-Brown, J. & Wagner, P. (2026). *Following the Money of Mass Incarceration 2026.* Prison Policy Initiative.
- McElligott, G. (2017). Invested in Prisons: Prison Expansion and Community Development in Canada. *Studies in Social Justice, 11*(1), 86–112.

---

[22] Montes, A. N., & Mears, D.P. (2019). Privatized Corrections in the 21st Century Reframing the Privatization Debate. Criminology & Public Policy.

[23] *Ibid.*

[24] Lindsey, A. M., Mears, D. P., & Cochran, J. C. (2016). The Privatization Debate: A Conceptual Framework for Improving (Public and Private) Corrections. Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice.