

# LAWRENCEVILLE CORRECTIONAL CENTER:

## FOR-PROFIT PRISON RUN AMOK

A REPORT BY

THE VIRGINIA INTERFAITH CENTER FOR PUBLIC POLICY  
WITH SPECIAL ASSISTANCE FROM SALT

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# A SPECIAL THANK YOU

To the brave people who shared their stories in the name of justice.

# ORGANIZATION SNAPSHOT



The Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy (VICPP) is the Commonwealth's oldest and largest faith-based network advocating racial, social, and economic justice in Virginia's policies and practices. VICPP is a non-partisan coalition of 25,000 members – which includes 750 houses of worship, 1,000 clergy of all faiths and people of goodwill, ten regional chapters, many partner and affiliate organizations, most of the judicatory leaders in the state, and activists in every House and Senate district in Virginia.

VICPP has successfully mobilized faith voices on abolition of the death penalty, Medicaid expansion, raising the minimum wage, predatory lending reform, wage theft reforms, health care for undocumented women, paid sick days for home care workers, and more. Through education, prayer, and action, VICPP continues to unite people through the shared goal of making society more just and equitable for ALL.



Social Action Linking Together (SALT) is a grass roots, faith-based network of over 1,300 legislative advocates across Virginia who deal with public social policy. SALT embraces the principle that “the justice of a society can be measured by how the most vulnerable members of that society are faring and being treated.” This principle can be found in all the great religious traditions and inspires SALT members to propose and shape fair public social policies through education of policy makers and advocacy for the poor and powerless.

# INTRODUCTION

The Lawrenceville Correctional Center (LVCC) is Virginia's only for-profit state prison facility. It is run by The GEO Group under a 15-year contract with the Virginia Department of Corrections (VADOC). Staff of the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy (VICPP) first heard about the horrible conditions from a correctional officer who was concerned that people incarcerated there were not getting enough food to eat. For forty years, VICPP has fought against economic injustice and social inequity, and for criminal justice reform, and so VICPP staff wanted to learn more and began investigating.

During the summer of 2022, VICPP Criminal Justice Reform Organizer Salim Khalfani, VICPP intern Mattison Payne (Master of Social Work, University of Illinois), and family members of people who are incarcerated at LVCC began investigating conditions at LVCC. They delved into prison operations and other details, and conversed with family members of incarcerated persons, community residents of Lawrenceville, and former LVCC correctional officers.

On June 14, 2022, Salim Khalfani, Mattison Payne, and VICPP Director of Communications Ayesha Taylor met with community leaders at a Lawrenceville library. The Brunswick Unit of the NAACP invited VICPP to bring a religious fact-finding delegation to visit Lawrenceville and hear from community leaders about the prison.

The religious fact-finding delegation was hosted on July 23, 2022 by Lawrenceville resident Rev. Earl Jarrell at his congregation, Poplar Mount Baptist Church. In addition to Rev. Jarrell, members of the delegation included Dr. Roger Gench, Mr. Donald Baylor, VICPP Board Vice-Chair Rev. Dr. Anthony Fludd, and VICPP Board members Rev. Lauren Ramseur and Ms. Aliya Farooq.



## 11 DRUG OVERDOSES IN 24 HOURS

Before this report was completed, VICPP staffers were contacted by family members about 11 overdoses, including one death, that occurred within a 24-hour period in early August, 2022. VICPP issued a press release<sup>1</sup> about the tragedy and the Virginia Mercury ran a scathing story about the overdoses.<sup>2</sup> This media attention prompted The GEO Group to respond publicly and the Department of Corrections to investigate.

After the media story, more families reached out to VICPP with more horror stories of inhumane conditions in the prison complex. Social Action Linking Together (SALT) leaders reached out, as well, to offer their expertise, based on work they had done in 2020 seeking (unsuccessfully) to abolish private prisons in Virginia. SALT reviewed this report and added content and analysis.

VICPP staff members have not been inside the LVCC prison facility, but they do know how to listen to currently and formerly incarcerated people and their families and recognize when something is seriously wrong. Lawrenceville Correctional Center is a prison run amok.

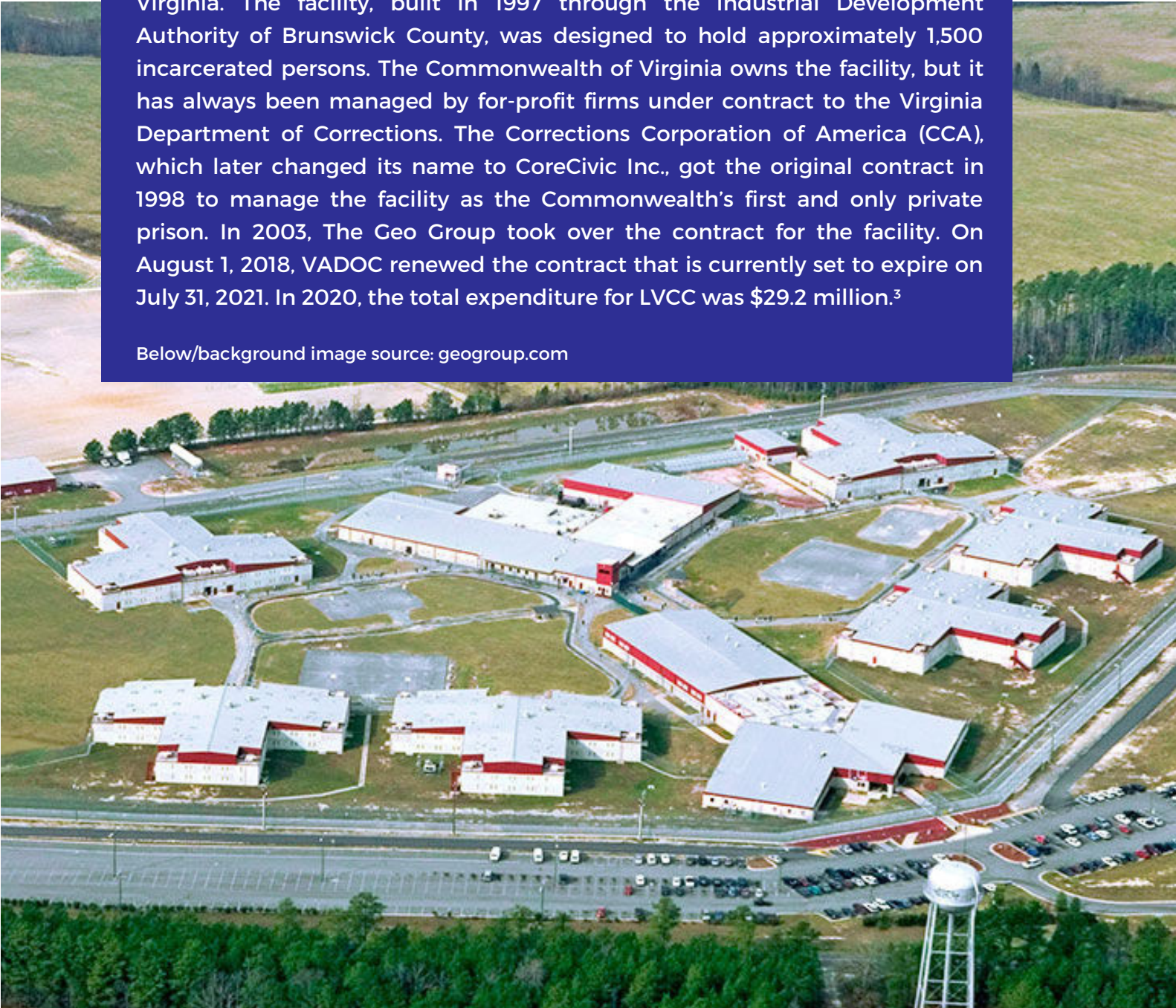
## OBJECTIVE

This report documents what has been learned and outlines recommendations for improving the situation. Prisons should be, and claim to be, a place of rehabilitation and learning, not torture, starvation, drug overdose, and death. Incarcerated people deserve better. Correctional officers deserve better. Families deserve better. And taxpayers who support our prison system deserve better. Everyone pays the price for for-profit prison management.

# BACKGROUND ON LAWRENCEVILLE CORRECTIONAL CENTER

The Lawrenceville Correctional Center is a medium-security correctional facility (prison) located in Lawrenceville, Brunswick County, in Southside Virginia. The facility, built in 1997 through the Industrial Development Authority of Brunswick County, was designed to hold approximately 1,500 incarcerated persons. The Commonwealth of Virginia owns the facility, but it has always been managed by for-profit firms under contract to the Virginia Department of Corrections. The Corrections Corporation of America (CCA), which later changed its name to CoreCivic Inc., got the original contract in 1998 to manage the facility as the Commonwealth's first and only private prison. In 2003, The Geo Group took over the contract for the facility. On August 1, 2018, VADOC renewed the contract that is currently set to expire on July 31, 2021. In 2020, the total expenditure for LVCC was \$29.2 million.<sup>3</sup>

Below/background image source: geogroup.com



# BACKGROUND ON FOR-PROFIT PRISONS

During the 1980s, the War on Drugs and harsher sentencing laws dramatically increased the nation's population of incarcerated persons, placing a strain on the public sector. In this context, for-profit prisons emerged as a solution to the expanding need for facilities, staff, and management.<sup>4</sup>

**CoreCivic Inc. (formerly CCA) and The Geo Group, which manages LVCC, quickly grew to become the two largest operators in the field, managing more than half the for-profit prisons in the U.S.**<sup>5</sup> These companies both claim they provide high quality services at lower costs to the public.<sup>6</sup> The industry-supported research and the companies' websites claim the companies are great for workers, incarcerated people, and taxpayers; however, the findings of independent studies conducted by the U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) and university researchers do not support these claims.<sup>7</sup>

Private prison companies are set up to make profits for their shareholders. Although the companies would like the public to believe that their savings come from their brilliant management, most of their savings come from operating with fewer staff and paying the staff less in salary and benefits than the public sector.<sup>8</sup> The lower levels of staffing and the higher rates of turnover caused by low salaries make prisons more dangerous.<sup>9</sup> This has clearly been seen in the case of LVCC.

**At the federal level, the outlook for for-profit prisons is changing.** In January 2021, President Biden issued the following statement:

“The Attorney General shall not renew Department of Justice contracts with privately operated criminal detention facilities, as consistent with applicable law.”

This will eventually mean that people incarcerated in federal prisons will only be held in publicly run prisons. States like Virginia in which for-profit state prisons still exist need to follow the federal direction and not renew private contracts.



# THE GEO GROUP

The Geo Group is a for-profit corporation that invests in private prison and mental health facilities throughout North America, Australia, South Africa, and the United Kingdom. Founded in 1984, it was known as the Wackenhut Corrections Corporation until 2003 when the name was changed to The Geo Group. The company is headquartered in Boca Raton, Florida.

## A REPEAT OFFENDER

Despite its website's claim of high ethical standards, the company has a history of violations. According to the Violation Tracker, compiled and operated by Good Jobs First, The Geo Group has collected penalties of at least \$12 million since the year 2000. The top offense reported by groups has been employment-related offenses, mostly wage and hour violations – essentially, the company cheated workers of their legally owed wages (known as wage theft) – but also discrimination charges. The violation incurring the largest dollar amount fee was for kickbacks and bribery related to competing for contracts.<sup>10</sup> The Geo Group has a documented history of boldly engaging in illegal activities and breaking laws.

In Virginia, The Geo Group has routinely violated its contract with VADOC for years. It has been fined nearly \$800,000 for contract violations. Many of the violations are for understaffing of security and health positions.<sup>11</sup>

Delegate Elizabeth Guzman is quoted as having said: <sup>12</sup>

**“They have incentives to cut corners. It’s cheaper for them to pay for damages than it is to just meet the terms of the contract.”**

# POLITICAL CONTRIBUTIONS MADE BY THE GEO GROUP

Despite the company's dubious practices and track record around the country, it continues to get contracts. Why? One reason clearly is that the company invests in legislators, who make the decisions about keeping or getting contracts. In Virginia, The GEO Group has invested heavily in legislators of both major political parties – especially those on important committees or those serving in leadership positions. **From 2020 through July 2022, The GEO Group invested more than \$85,000 in Virginia legislators. Of those contributions made, here are the Virginia legislators who received amounts of at least \$1,000:**<sup>13</sup>

\$ 25,000	Delegate Luke Torian (given when he chaired House Appropriations Committee)
\$ 15,000	Governor Glenn Youngkin
\$ 5,000	Senator Louise Lucas (Senate President Pro Tempore)
\$ 5,000	Delegate Don Scott (currently House Minority leader, but also a champion for incarcerated people)
\$ 4,500	Delegate Roslyn Tyler (used to represent Brunswick County)
\$ 3,000	Senator Joe Morrissey (champion for criminal justice reform)
\$ 2,000	Delegate Todd Gilbert (House Majority leader)
\$ 2,000	Senate Janet Howell (Chairs the Senate Finance Committee)
\$ 2,000	Delegate Paul Krizek (serves on House Appropriations Committee, Public Safety Subcommittee)
\$ 2,000	Senator Monty Mason (serves on Senate Rehab and Social Services Committee)
\$ 2,000	Senator Ryan McDougale (Senate Republican Caucus Chair)
\$ 2,000	Senator Tommy Norment (Senate Minority Leader)
\$ 2,000	Senator Frank Ruff (represents part of Brunswick County)
\$ 2,000	Senator Richard Saslaw (Senate Majority Leader)
\$ 2,000	Senator Lionell Spruill (serves on Senate Rehab and Social Services Committee)
\$ 1,000	Senator John Cosgrove (serves on Senate Rehab and Social Services Committee)
\$ 1,000	Delegate Charniele Herring (House Minority Whip, was chair of Courts of Justice)
\$ 1,000	Senate Jen Kiggans (serves on Senate Rehab and Social Services Committee)
\$ 1,000	Senator Mamie Locke (Senate Democratic Caucus Chair, and serves on Senate Rehab and Social Services Committee)

# THE DISINFORMATION CAMPAIGN

In addition to making political contributions, The Geo Group has very deliberately and successfully spread fear throughout the community and among elected political leaders at all levels that termination of The GEO Group's LVCC contract would be devastating to the local economy and the community's wellbeing. One of these prominent lies is that LVCC would be forced to shut its doors indefinitely if the transition were to happen.

Lawrenceville residents shared their concerns with VICPP during VICPP staff's June 14, 2022 visit to Lawrenceville. If LVCC were to close, people who are currently incarcerated there would be transplanted elsewhere, very likely to facilities a considerable distance away from their loved ones residing in and nearby Lawrenceville. This would make it much more difficult or even impossible for people to visit their incarcerated loved ones. In addition, the local, already struggling economy – a significant portion of which is currently supported by the jobs provided at LVCC – would collapse.

For these reasons, the plan of action for any transition of management from The GEO Group to VADOC must include assuring the community at large of the benefits that would result from a transfer, and reassuring them that a transfer would not close the facility. Rather, it would transfer the facility's operational responsibilities to the Commonwealth, and this would be to the benefit of the people who are incarcerated and employed there, the local economy, and the taxpayers. This step is necessary in order to overcome the long time GEO Group disinformation campaign that has spread the lie that private GEO Group-led operation and management is more beneficial to all parties involved. Based on the findings of this report, it is clear that The GEO Group's claims are untrue.

## SEVERE STAFFING SHORTAGES AT LAWRENCEVILLE CORRECTIONAL CENTER

The number one problem at LVCC is a severe staffing shortage that is driven by its low wages and benefits. The problems were exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic. The primary way that for-profit prisons make money is by providing their workers – private-sector employees – lower wages and smaller benefit packages that are significantly less than that which public-sector workers earn.

When facilities are short-staffed, incarcerated people are denied basic services. VICPP first began investigating LVCC because VICPP heard people were going hungry. People incarcerated at LVCC say that sometimes they are not fed until 3 p.m. in the afternoon – because the prison is short-staffed.

LVCC’s contract calls for the operator of LVCC to manage the health care of the people incarcerated there. When there is a shortage of medical personnel, health care services are adversely impacted.

When there are not enough correctional officers or program employees to staff recreation and education programs, incarcerated persons are cheated of these life-sustaining and healing resources.

When there is a shortage of correctional officers, there are security risks both for people who are incarcerated and who work there. No well-staffed and well-run prison would see the quantity of drug overdoses that occurred in the summer of 2022 at the Lawrenceville Correctional Center.

Further, correctional officers who are not paid a living wage – enough to care for their selves and families – are easily tempted to snuggle in drugs or turn a blind eye to corruption to make a few extra dollars.



# LIQUIDATED DAMAGES FOR UNDERSTAFFING VIOLATIONS AUGUST 2018 THROUGH JULY 2020

LVCC staff shortages are not new and not due solely to COVID-19. VADOC records of liquidated damages (fines) from August 2018 through July 2020 show a pattern of low staffing in violation of the contract with The GEO Group long before the pandemic. Most of the regular staffing shortages are of corrections officers. In the health care area, the shortages include numerous types of health care professionals. The following are liquidated damages charged to The GEO Group for not providing adequate staffing in the listed months:<sup>14</sup>

	<u>Regular Staffing.</u>	<u>Health Staffing.</u>
Aug. 2018	--	\$1,950
Sep. 2018	\$6,608	\$4,228
Oct. 2018	\$2046	\$3,652
Nov. 2018	\$868	\$2,522
Dec. 2018	\$11,032	\$2,810
Jan. 2019	\$16,221	\$1,374
Feb. 2019	\$17,595	\$15,493
Mar. 2019	\$2,167	\$5,168
Apr. 2019	\$744	\$11,284
May 2019	\$3,844	\$13,138
Jun. 2019	\$24,976	\$18,472
Jul. 2019	\$52,496	\$15,806
Aug. 2019	\$21,168	\$14,308
Sep. 2019	\$5010	\$8,624
Oct. 2019	\$9,791	\$7,766
Nov. 2019	\$20,057	\$10,956
Dec. 2019	\$73,230	\$6,156
Jan. 2020	\$115,404	\$18,418
Feb. 2020	\$37,408	\$4,761
Mar. 2020	\$77,677	\$9,510
Apr. 2020	\$16,780	\$1046
May 2020	\$24,676	\$882
Jun. 2020	\$25,646	\$3,732
Jul. 2020	\$1,612	\$2,052



Clearly, the liquidated damages were not sufficient to matter to The Geo Group. It consistently operated short-staffed despite being in violation of the contract with VADOC.

Paying low wages does increase shareholder profits, but it harms those who are incarcerated and makes the job of a correctional officer even harder than it already is.

Low wages cause and exacerbate understaffing. Understaffing endangers both incarcerated people and correctional officers.

## EXTORTION AND VIOLENCE

In August 2022, Ms. Kay Cummings reached out to Salim Khalfani at VICPP after she read an article in the Virginia Mercury Newspaper by Sarah Vogelsong about the drug overdoses and resulting deaths at LVCC. Ms. Cummings is the 80-year-old grandmother of Nicholas Cummings, who was incarcerated at LVCC at the time of the writing of this report. She shared with VICPP her desperation to get help for her grandson and alleged that she had been making payments in exchange for her grandson's life, but that she was no longer able to make the payments and feared her grandson would be retaliated against. In the phone call with VICPP's Salim Khalfani, Ms. Cummings recounted the following incidents and details.

Ms. Cummings claimed that Nicholas, who also goes by Nick, told his grandmother his life was in danger at LVCC and that he was being threatened by persons also incarcerated there. Nick alleged that the gangs virtually "run" the institution. Gang members, he claimed, can go from building to building and can get Corrections Officers to open cell doors for them.

# EXTORTION AND VIOLENCE

## A GRANDMOTHER'S CALLS FOR HELP

Ms. Cummings had begun making the payments in April of 2022. She was ordered to make the initial payments through Nick's cellmate who would give the payments to someone they referred to as the "protector." Here are the dates and amounts she paid over the next few months:

APR. 27	\$ 1,200
APR. 27	\$ 30
MAY 4	\$ 300
MAY 17	\$ 400
JUN. 8	\$ 1,800
JUN. 25	\$ 3,000
JUN. 25	\$ 25
JUN. 27	\$ 50
JUN. 30	\$ 400
JUL. 4	\$ 500
JUL. 6	\$ 1,750

Ms. Cummings believes she has the names, phone numbers, bank account numbers, and bank routing numbers belonging to the outside contacts of the "protectors."





Then, Ms. Cummings claimed, a new group of “protectors” demanded \$10,000. Ms. Cummings did not have that amount of money and so did not make the demanded payment. Soon thereafter, it is alleged that an incarcerated person came from another building that is part of the LVCC facility into Nick’s building and was allowed into Nick’s cell – allegedly by staff. This incarcerated person physically assaulted Nick, causing Nick to have a broken eye socket, broken jaw, and his eyelid needing to be sewn back on. Nick was flown by helicopter to the University of North Carolina Hospital, where he underwent various surgeries. He and his cellmate were moved into solitary confinement, and as of the time that Ms. Cummings relayed these incidents to VICPP over the August 22 phone conversation, Nick was to remain in solitary confinement until all his medical treatments would be concluded.

Ms. Cummings also shared with VICPP that after her grandson was attacked, she had informed the LVCC warden of the situation, but the warden had not responded to her desperate pleas. When VICPP learned of the situation, VICPP reached out to VADOC Director Harold Clarke and his upper management staff. Mr. Clarke agreed to investigate all the allegations. The warden finally called Ms. Cummings and allowed her to talk with her grandson. This was the first time Ms. Cummings had been able to speak to her grandson in some time.

As of the time of this writing, this matter remains unresolved.





## EXTORTION AND VIOLENCE

### A MOURNING MOTHER'S QUEST FOR ANSWERS

On September 16, 2022, Ms. Elizabeth Burns reached out to VICPP's Salim Khalfani to ask for help in getting information about her son, Matthew David Wakefield, Sr., who experienced a drug overdose and died at Lawrenceville Correctional Center on March 10, 2022. Ms. Burns relayed the following incidents and details to VICPP over a phone call.

For 11 years, Matthew was incarcerated at Augusta Correctional Center. Ms. Burns said that her son had had a drug problem in the past but had overcome it. Matthew's parents had a video visit with him on Saturday, March 5, 2022 during which Matthew made plans with his father for the future. Matthew told his parents that he had been in solitary confinement by request because he was tired of the gangs and their extortion attempts. His family could not afford to pay for his protection.

On March 8, 2022, Matthew was told to start packing his belongings because he was going to be transferred to a different facility any day. Because Matthew's family had complained about the extortion attempts, Matthew and his parents were contacted by investigator Sean McDaniels. Mr. McDaniels told Matthew and his family that he would have to speak to the alleged extortionists in order to file a complaint. Matthew and his family told Mr. McDaniels that they did not want to proceed with the complaint because Matthew was still incarcerated there.

Ms. Burns claimed that the next day, a gang member allegedly said to Matthew,

**“We know your mother's name, what she said, what you said.”**

On March 9, 2022, Matthew was transferred to the Lawrenceville Correctional Center. He had told his parents that he would call them when he transferred to General Population on March 10. Instead, on March 10, 2022, Ms. Burns received a call telling her that Matthew had been found dead at 12 p.m. from a drug overdose. When she received her son's body, she saw that he had large trauma-induced marks on his face indicating that he had possibly been beaten. Ms. Burns and her family suspect that it was gang retaliation.

## Matthew Burns did not last 12 hours at LVCC.

The family has requested details about what happened to their son and as of the phone call between Ms. Burns and Salim Khalfani on September 16, 2022, The GEO Group has refused to provide any information or explanation.<sup>15</sup>

## DRUG OVERDOSES AND DEATHS

Illegal drugs are not supposed to be in prisons, but they are – and they endanger those incarcerated as well as strain local emergency medical services. According to a News Channel 6 report, the Brunswick County Sheriff said LVCC accounts for more than half of the reported drug overdoses of the entire Virginia prisons system.<sup>16</sup>

There were five deaths in FY 2021 and 12 deaths in 2022 at LVCC.<sup>17</sup> Although the deaths were not necessarily all from drug overdoses, a doubling of the number of deaths in one year is concerning.

According to the Brunswick Office of Emergency Communications, 204 calls for service were placed from the prison between January 1, 2021 and May 20, 2022 – 39 were for drug overdoses and 21 were for responding to an unconscious person.<sup>18</sup>

This level of calls to a county emergency response system places enormous strain on the system. Emergency response personnel and resources end up being focused on the prison, and potentially could be delayed in responding to other community concerns including life-or-death situations. Why should the local community services bear the brunt of a prison run amok?

## IN THEIR WORDS STORIES FROM PEOPLE

The following is a collection of statements made by incarcerated people, their families, and prison workers. Statements have been copied and pasted verbatim into this report.

### STORIES FROM INCARCERATED PEOPLE AND THEIR LOVED ONES

"He has a heart condition, and since he has been at Lawrenceville he hasn't gotten the cardiologist. And because of the lack of medical attention that he has gotten, it has fatally gotten worse." <sup>19</sup>

Francesca Hylton, testifying before a Senate Committee, January 2021

"I was there when a prisoner was killed by another prisoner. It was just the dumbest thing ever."

Posted online by Bobcat, November 3, 2021.

"If you have any loved ones in Lawrenceville Correctional facility please check on them! I have been receiving information on the terrible conditions the inmates are enduring all day. I received information from another active employee stating that new hires are being given shifts meant for more experienced officers. There have been claims of a COVID outbreak and no running water. Please be aware that these atrocities are violations of these inmates' constitutional rights. They do not deserve this cruel and unusual punishment! Someone needs to step up and take control of this situation."

Facebook post by Dante Davis, July 23, 2020

"My husband is in Lawrenceville Correctional. This is the most awful facility he has been in by far! He is extorted on a daily basis by other inmates. If there was ever a facility that needed shutting down, its Lawrenceville Correctional!!!"

Facebook post by Toni Epperson, 2021

"My son tells me there was a trail of blood leading from 50 building to medical. Someone apparently got stabbed."

Facebook post by Clint Radford, 2020

"My son is sick and asked for medical help and was refused. He test positive for COVID. No hot water the other day. No water at all in fact. Fruit is rotten they are giving out."

Facebook post by Khalilah Ruley Ottrix, 2020

"It appears that VADOC needs to take control over the facility - that is all my husband talks about. His stories about the drugs in the facility are awful."

Facebook post by Sonya McQueen, 2021

'VADOC is still responsible, but they just allow GEO to run it and "profit" off the guys as folks say.'

Facebook post by Krystal Rambo, 2021



"Inhumane reports from my son, since news article last month inmates are being punished...for talking, in lockdown 23-1 for a month now hot plates microwaves to kill bacteria of drinking water taken no medical my son has been on emergency status to see dentist abscess tooth jaw now over 3 months waiting for surgery on his broken leg over a yr. 3 yr wait to see cardiologist for fluid on his heart."

Message sent to SALT by WH, September, 2022

## STORIES FROM CORRECTIONAL OFFICERS

"I used to work there. I remember a lot of forced overtime and that was back in 2013. I remember we had a REAL bad snow that year and I had never driven in the snow and I didn't want to drive in it. My watch commander said something along the lines of, "you know you're gonna pay for this when you get back, right?" First night they needed someone for overtime which was literally my first night back, they yanked me for it and stuck me in the worst building there at the time. Keep in mind that I had only been working there for maybe a month or two when this happened. Crazy. GEO isn't a very good company to work for."

Facebook post by Randall L. Chatlin, 2020

"Offenders going months, weeks and days without meds. No consistent living conditions. No protection because we are short staffed. We as staff are among every positive person for 12+ hours since COVID started. We are burnt out."

Facebook post by Stephen Baskerville, 2020

"Always treated unfairly. Do the most work and get paid the least. Superior neve[r] care and leave all the work to you. No recognition. No overtime. No pay raise."

Posted on Indeed.com by a Corrections Counselor, March 9, 2022

"Worst place I've ever chosen to work. No breaks, not help, little pay, very dangerous, no training."

Posted on Indeed.com by a Sergeant, December 6, 2021

"Run if you can! They make you work mandatory overtime. There's favoritism there so some people can do things that others can't. Management along with some of the staff bring in contraband to the inmates. Some people get "walked off" for bringing in contraband and they hire them back. Some of the buildings flood when it rains and the staff just ignore the inmates. Some inmates have died due to neglect."

Posted on Indeed.com by a Correctional Officer, November 19, 2019

"This Company can be so much better if the bigwigs would practice what the preach! It is obvious the upper management is getting all the benefits and leaving the scraps for the bottom of the barrel. They are consistently understaffed and work the shoes off of the ones they do have."

Posted on Indeed.com by a Charge Nurse, January 2, 2022

"Not worth the stress. Better off working for the DOC."

Posted on Indeed.com by a Correctional Officer, December 17, 2019

"This place does not value their employees at all...Very unprofessional and so many security hazards, it's ridiculous. They are always short staffed to the point where you may run a whole building by yourself from the booth, no floor officer. So many overdoses and deaths have occurred! It's a great place to work if you don't have a voice, don't mind being disrespected by your coworkers and love to be in harms way. This place should be shut down.... Go work for the Department of Corrections, better benefits and better pay and treatment."

Posted on Indeed.com by a Correctional Officer, December 17, 2019

## COSTS

### FOR DOC TO NOT RENEW THE GEO GROUP CONTRACT

In 2020, the Virginia General Assembly enacted House Bill 30 (Chapter 1289) Item 402#3c Item 1. This legislation directed VADOC to conduct a study of the potential costs for VADOC to take over management of LVCC. VADOC contracted with CGL Companies to conduct the study.<sup>20</sup>

In the report's executive summary, it is stated that LVCC's fiscal year 2020 expenditures were \$29.2 million. It is further stated that if VADOC took over management, it would cost the state \$38.5 million, an increase of \$9.3 million more. Here is the reason why, as excerpted from the report:

"An analysis of VADOC operation of Lawrenceville shows that the Department would increase staffing at the facility to provide adequate relief and address needs for improved security. The additional staff and the higher overall compensation levels for state employees would drive the operating cost of the facility up to \$38.5 million."<sup>21</sup>

"Lower costs at LVCC are primarily attributable to lower staffing and compensation levels than found in VADOC facilities. Differences in staffing stem from lower numbers of relief staff as well as fewer correctional officers posted to direct supervision of inmates."<sup>22</sup>

In other words, to operate the facility safely and pay the workers fairly, it costs more. This should come as no surprise to anyone, especially VADOC and legislators.

The report also states that LVCC has experienced interruptions in water service due to deteriorating infrastructure.<sup>23</sup> It is estimated that LVCC has at least \$10 million in deferred maintenance work.<sup>24</sup>

Indeed, it will cost money to make the Lawrenceville Correctional Center a healthy and safe place for all people who are incarcerated there and work there.

# VIRGINIA'S MORAL OBLIGATION TO THOSE IN ITS CARE

Virginia has a moral obligation to address the situation at Lawrenceville Correctional Center. The GEO Group has failed to provide humane and rehabilitative correctional services. A primary concern of prison administration should be rehabilitation of those incarcerated and making certain that the taxpayer money spent for this rehabilitation is not enriching for-profit prison shareholders.

For-profit prisons have an inherent conflict of interest – the focus is not on the incarcerated people, workers, or the taxpayers that pay the bills but instead on investors expecting to profit from their investment. Corporations that manage taxpayer-supported institutions have not been selected by the people, and are, therefore, not accountable to them. Their accountability is to their shareholders.

The legal ability to use force to deprive citizens of their liberty should be held exclusively by the duly elected government. Since the government is elected by the people to act in a fiduciary capacity, it is obligated to pursue what is in the best interest of its constituents. It is in the Commonwealth's best interest to provide humane and rehabilitative care to the citizens in its custody, having the goal to maximize their chance of successfully rejoining society as productive members of their communities.

For-profit prisons have the motivation to minimally train their staff, provide them with the lowest wages the market will bear, and staff their facilities at low levels to maximize profits and shareholder returns. The 2020 report commissioned by VADOC found that the starting salary for guards at LVCC was approximately \$13,000 less than the starting salary for state-employed guards.<sup>25</sup>

LVCC is severely understaffed. The reason LVCC has fewer guards is not because The GEO Group has determined a more efficient way to safely guard prisons; it has done no such thing. Rather, The GEO Group is simply trying to turn a profit and provide a greater benefit to its shareholders at the expense of the very people for whom it is legally and morally responsible.

Without the primary focus being on safeguarding incarcerated persons and providing opportunities for education and rehabilitation, the chances of incarcerated persons successfully returning to society after completing their time in prison are greatly reduced. This wastes public resources and endangers all of society.

Although Brunswick County benefits from jobs provided by LVCC, it is harmed by the enormous strain on its emergency response systems, and the benefits would be much greater if its workers were paid better and conditions were safer.

Prisons, prison operators, and the Commonwealth of Virginia hold a legal and moral obligation to care for all people under their charge. The GEO Group has failed in fulfilling this obligation and commitment





# RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the fact-finding delegation to Lawrenceville, research, and conversations with people who have been incarcerated, their family members, and correctional officers, VICPP recommends:

- 1)** The Virginia Department of Corrections should NOT renew the contract with The GEO Group when it ends July 31, 2023 and should make plans to take over management and hire and train staff for working in the facility.
- 2)** The Virginia Department of Corrections should seek to rehire the currently employed front-line staff. Invite all current correctional officers and front-line staff to apply for employment with VADOC. Provide hiring preference combined with additional training so staff can learn to do their jobs well.
- 3)** The General Assembly should allocate the financial resources required for VADOC to take over management of the facility and staff it adequately to assure the safety of all, thereby fulfilling Virginia's fiduciary responsibility to those who are incarcerated and to taxpayers. Anything less will perpetuate the existing failure.

# ENDNOTES

1. <https://www.virginiainterfaithcenter.org/press/8-confirmed-overdoses-occurred-in-24-hours-at-lawrenceville-correctional-center-possibly-11-total/>
2. <https://www.virginiamercury.com/2022/08/10/state-investigating-after-overdoses-death-at-privately-run-lawrenceville-prison/>
3. Lawrenceville Correctional Center Management Study, Virginia Department of Corrections, September 18, 2020, p 1.
4. Capitalizing on Mass Incarceration: U.S. Growth in Private Prisons, The Sentencing Project, August 2018, p 8.
5. Ibid, p 12.
6. [https://www.corecivic.com/hubfs/\\_resources/What%20We%20Do%20Card.pdf](https://www.corecivic.com/hubfs/_resources/What%20We%20Do%20Card.pdf) and [https://www.geogroup.com/who\\_we\\_are](https://www.geogroup.com/who_we_are).
7. Capitalizing on Mass Incarceration: U.S. Growth in Private Prisons, The Sentencing Project, August 2018, p 10.
8. <https://www.correctionalofficeredu.org/salaries/>
9. Kicking the National Habit: The Legal and Policy Arguments for Abolishing Private Prison Contracts, ABA – Public Contract Law Journal Vol. 39, No. 1 (Fall 2009), pp. 113-139.
10. [https://violationtracker.goodjobsfirst.org/?company\\_op=starts&company=GEO+Group&offense\\_group=&agency\\_code=](https://violationtracker.goodjobsfirst.org/?company_op=starts&company=GEO+Group&offense_group=&agency_code=)
11. Virginia’s only private prison is routinely short-staffed and in breach of its contract with the state, WRIC, January 29, 2021.
12. Ibid.
13. [https://www.vpap.org/donors/126710-geo-group-inc/?start\\_year=2020&end\\_year=2022](https://www.vpap.org/donors/126710-geo-group-inc/?start_year=2020&end_year=2022)
14. These were records requested by Charles Meire on September 18, 2020 under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) from the Virginia Department of Corrections.
15. As told by Elizabeth Burns to Salim Khalfani over the phone on September 16, 2022.
16. Virginia Sheriff is Concerned about This Prison: ‘You Failed This Community,’ Channel 6 News Richmond, September 20, 2022.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Effort to Shut Down Virginia’s Only Private Prison Dies and Early Death in Richmond, WVTF, January 15, 2021.
20. Lawrenceville Correctional Center Management Study, Virginia Department of Corrections, September 18, 2020, Foreword.
21. Ibid., p 1.
22. Ibid., p 5.
23. Ibid., p 4.
24. Ibid., p 19.
25. Lawrenceville Correctional Center Management Study, Virginia Department of Corrections, September 18, 2020.

**LAWRENCEVILLE CORRECTIONAL CENTER:  
FOR-PROFIT PRISON RUN AMOK**

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