



Myths vs. Reality in Private Corrections: The Truth Behind the Criticism

Since its founding in 1983, CCA and the private corrections industry it founded has experienced its share of criticism and scrutiny, primarily from special interest groups and opponents of public-private partnerships. The fact is that the corrections industry, including publicly and privately managed institutions, has been and will always be a controversial and highly regulated one. Such an environment, however, only motivates CCA to perform to the best of its ability and to continue to prove its worth in meeting government's correctional needs.

MYTH: Private companies experience higher rates of assaults and escapes.

REALITY: **Historical, statistical data for related incidents actually reveal that public and private sector performances are comparable.** Specific to escapes, CCA's escape rate for the past three years is ten times lower than the rate for the most recent three years of data for the public sector.

MYTH: Private companies consistently offer poor training of correctional staff and employ unqualified personnel.

REALITY: **In every single instance, CCA training of correctional staff meets or exceeds all established standards by the American Correctional Association, as well as the stringent requirements of the jurisdiction with whom the company contracts.** In many instances, CCA employees complete training alongside their public sector counterparts. In addition to a 40-hour orientation program for all new, full-time employees, all security personnel receive a minimum of 120 hours of training during their first year of employment. Additionally, staff receive 40 hours of in-service training each year. And designated staff receive specialized training to enhance security and control. CCA's commitment to quality training is exemplified by the presence of a full-time managing director of Staff Development and Training, division training managers and a full-time training manager at every CCA facility.

MYTH: Private companies' poor security record is due in part to low pay of correctional staff.

REALITY: **CCA offers competitive salaries to attract and retain qualified employees.** That is sound business practice. However, salary is not the only benefit that an employee considers when deciding to work for an employer. CCA offers a comprehensive health benefits package and 401K retirement plan. Because CCA is so large – dozens of facilities across the country – the company can provide employees with great flexibility and opportunities for lateral and promotional moves that are not typically possible in publicly managed corrections systems.

MYTH: Private companies have higher turnover of correctional staff than the public sector.

REALITY: **CCA's retention record is comparable to many public corrections systems.** It is difficult to compare equally, as most state, federal and local systems have differing measures for calculating retention levels. Attracting and retaining staff is a challenge facing the entire corrections profession – public and private. This is due partly to the dangerous, high-stress nature of corrections that not everyone is suited for, and partly because of the highly competitive market that pits corrections against many other professions for qualified employees in a time when many employees choose to try various new careers. Regardless, To address this challenge, CCA has expanded its Human Resource department in order to work

diligently on new and innovative efforts to attract and retain staff. An example includes assigning veteran staff to work alongside new staff as mentors.

MYTH: Private companies are in the immoral business of profiting from prisons.

REALITY: **No one would argue that people providing these dangerous, difficult and meaningful services should be denied compensation for their efforts.** The fact that they work for a company or for a government agency in no way diminishes the significance or importance of the services they provide. However, if a company can partner with government to provide the same or better level of service at a cost savings, then those saved tax dollars can in theory be appropriated to other meaningful services like education, health care for the poor, or other social justice initiatives.

MYTH: Private companies are actively engaged in legislation to promote longer and tougher sentences in order to keep beds filled and increase profits.

REALITY: **The industry absolutely does not participate in or lobby for stricter sentencing.** In fact, several companies in this industry provide services that serve as alternatives to sentencing, such as electronic monitoring, day reporting centers and probations services. Lobbying for longer sentences does not lead to increased business. Providing safe, secure facilities that offer meaningful programs and services for inmates does.

MYTH: The presence of private facilities greatly reduces property values and economic vitality of communities in which they are located.

REALITY: **To the contrary, the existence of a private correctional facility enhances the economic vitality of a community in a variety of ways.** Through the creation of jobs, a demand for housing and other services enhances property values and local businesses. Residents with gainful employment significantly impact the overall tax base for the community and help spur new businesses. Furthermore, unlike a public prison, a privately managed prison is subject to all applicable taxes like property and sales taxes. Many communities hosting CCA facilities have been able to upgrade and enhance infrastructure for utility services as a result from the increase use and subsequent funds paid by CCA for said services. It has also been the case that in some host communities taxes for local residents have remained constant or even reduced as a result of tax revenues received from CCA.

MYTH: Private facilities offer poor programs for inmates and have very little concern for rehabilitation.

REALITY: **CCA has a great emphasis on quality programs for inmates.** CCA's frequently updated, targeted programs for education, vocational training, faith-

based instruction, counseling and substance abuse help rehabilitate offenders and return them to more productive lives in society. We measure and report program effectiveness as a key part of our accountability to government customers. As part of our contracted agreement with customers – and often well above the stated minimum programmatic requirements – every CCA facility offers a wide array of programs. A core program package is provided in CCA prisons and jails – programs intended to raise offenders’ basic skill and literacy levels. Enhanced program opportunities are available to facilitate higher levels of achievement which could significantly increase the likelihood of an offender’s success upon release.

MYTH: Private companies have many incidents in their prisons and they shouldn’t be trusted to manage inmate populations.

REALITY: **Every large corrections system at some point will experience serious incidents but the true measure of an agency’s or company’s worth, however, is in how they respond to such adversities.** CCA has a track record of responding quickly and appropriately when corrective action is needed, to the complete satisfaction of our governmental customers and the communities we are located. The company’s 95% contract renewal rate validates the confidence placed in CCA by our customers.

MYTH: Private companies shouldn’t be allowed to manage inmates from other states. They bring in the “worst of the worst”, which is a threat to public safety. Additionally, once the out-of-state inmates complete their sentences, they are released locally in the state in which they are serving their time.

REALITY: **States do not send “the worst of the worst” out of state and upon completion of their sentence, inmates are released back to their state of origin.**

Many states are facing significant budget pressures that prohibit the ability to build or expand correctional capacity to match existing and growing needs. Housing offenders out of state provides a corrections agency flexibility in meeting its capacity needs in the short or long term – resulting in safer and more efficient facilities in-state as overcrowded conditions are relieved. Additionally, this alternative prevents the costly task of accessing capital for building new prisons or expanding existing ones.

MYTH: Private operators offer poor medical treatment to inmates, and their medical staff are discouraged from sending inmates to hospitals or emergency rooms because it takes away profit from the companies.

REALITY: **CCA offers high-quality medical treatment.** To do otherwise would make poor business sense, as a reputation for lower quality of services would eventually lead to a loss of existing contracts and the loss of future business. Expectations and guidelines for medical services are defined in the management contracts, ensuring that a company lives up to its promised level of services. All CCA facilities adhere to the standards of the American Correctional Association (ACA). The ACA, which covers all aspects of correctional management including medical services, represents the highest set of standards in the country. Some CCA facilities are also contractually required to be nationally accredited by the National Commission of Correctional Health Care (NCCHC).

MYTH: Private companies save costs by cutting corners in the areas of operations, food service, medical care and staff training/pay.

REALITY: **Absolutely CCA does not cut corners to save costs.** Because the private industry is not burdened by the time-consuming, bureaucratic procurement

guidelines of government, we are able to quickly identify and purchase goods and services at the best possible prices. CCA is able to achieve many cost savings through economies of scale, by contracting for goods and services company wide, thus getting even better prices. Additional cost savings are realized through efficient facility designs that result in more efficient staffing patterns. Savings are also achieved because private companies do not typically have as much administrative bureaucracy as their public counterparts.

MYTH: Private companies are beholden to their shareholders’ interests above the interests and well-being of their government customers and the inmates in their care.

REALITY: **All companies are contractually required to deliver a certain level of service.** Failure to do so results in lost contracts and ultimately going out of business. On a regular basis, government officials, contract monitors and auditors are on-site at private facilities ensuring that companies are performing at expected levels of service. Adding to this high degree of oversight, the additional scrutiny of shareholders only enhances the level of accountability that companies in this industry are held to – a level that is in many cases much higher than that of our public counterparts.

MYTH: Private companies operate at lower standards than public facilities.

REALITY: **Committed to the American Correctional Association (ACA), which represents the nation’s highest correctional standards, CCA proudly operates every facility according to the nearly 500 rigorous standards of ACA.** Additionally, CCA has established more than 150 operating standards by which our facilities are managed. Each CCA facility receives more than 15 internally conducted audits annually, as well as numerous external audits. Plus, our government customers audit the operation of our facilities.

MYTH: Private prisons are anti-union.

REALITY: **CCA’s commitment to its employees is reflected in our creating and maintaining the safest possible working conditions, offering competitive salaries and benefits, along with quality training and proper equipment to perform effectively on-the-job.** CCA recognizes the right of employees to choose – or not to choose – to be represented by a labor union. However, the vision, mission, and guiding principles of CCA, as well as the work environments created based upon those principles, for most of our employees, have made the perceived need for union representation to be both unnecessary and undesirable.

The vast majority of our employees have chosen to work directly with our management team in a union-free workplace. Only 7% of CCA’s workforce are represented by a labor union, which, interestingly enough, is the same national percentage of America’s private sector workforce represented by labor unions. In those situations where employees have elected union representation, CCA has respected that choice and has proven it can successfully manage unionized correctional facilities.

MYTH: Private prisons only house less expensive, low security inmates.

REALITY: **Private prisons are responsible for the safe and secure housing of inmates at all security levels, including maximum security.** The security levels of inmates housed in a private prison and the range of services and programs provided are determined by our customers and clearly defined in the management contracts. Contrary to this common myth, a majority of CCA-managed facilities house inmates of medium-security classification and higher.