

Correctional Corporation of America Accreditation Report Misses Stark Reality

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If you read its web site, the Corrections Corporation of America (CCA) has ample reasons to pat itself on the back: States are renewing or extending its contracts, several of its facilities got over 98 percent ratings for "safety and security" and it rounded off 2011 with a net income of \$40.5 million in earnings.

But below the spin is a different reality for the company and the prisoners that it oversees - food riots and abuse scandals. And alongside all this, the accreditations for its facilities come from a company that the American Civil Liberties Union's staff attorney David Shapiro calls "problematic."

The American Correctional Association (ACA) reaccredited 14 CCA facilities with ratings above 98 percent earlier this year, with seven facilities receiving a "perfect score" of 100 percent.

Below are the realities for several CCA facilities with exceptionally high scores:

North Folk Correctional Facility, Oklahoma - 100 Percent

North Folk was given an accreditation of 100 percent only three months after the rural Oklahoma prison was the center of a riot over food in October 2011. More than 100 inmates were involved. Prior to the disturbance, they had requested to speak to the warden about the quality of the food. CNN reported that at one point the riots had gotten so bad that a morgue had been set up outside the prison, though no fatalities were reported. Only California prisoners are housed at North Folk.

Stewart Detention Center, Georgia - 98.4 Percent

Stewart had the lowest score of all the detention facilities CCA chose to highlight - 98.4 percent. But a recently released report by the ACLU of Georgia shows that the facility did not feed prisoners enough, was overcrowded, had extreme temperatures, unclean clothing and a harsh disciplinary policy. Azadeh Shahshahani, director of the National Security and Immigrant Rights Project at the ACLU of Georgia, called the score "perplexing." Shahshahani said: "I wonder if any effort was made to speak to the detainees honestly and without fear about the treatment they are receiving. We continue to get complaints from the detainees at Stewart."

Tallahatchie County Correctional Facility, Mississippi - 100 Percent

Tallahatchie saw a disturbance at its immigration facility six months after the accreditation. The uprising left one prison guard dead.

The American Correctional Association

The CCA notes on its web site that over 93 percent of its 60 facilities have passed an audit done every three years by the ACA.

But critics question the reliability of the audit. A three-year accreditation from the ACA costs \$3,000 per day and \$1,500 dollars for the each auditor on the team. Ken Kopczynski, with the nonprofit Private Corrections Working Group, writes that this is a sign of pay for play.

He goes on to say that the ACA relies primarily on documents about the facility provided by the correctional agency, a concern echoed by the ACLU of Georgia's Shahshahani.

Kopczynski also notes that "at least two CCA employees serve as ACA auditors - CCA warden Todd Thomas and company vice president Dennis Bradby."

A Long History of Positive Accreditation, Despite Concerns

"This marks the 9th consecutive year the average ACA score for CCA accredited facilities has exceeded 99," said Don Murray, CCA managing director for quality assurance, in a press release. "In 2011, eleven facilities achieved a perfect 100 rating from ACA, which is an historic high for CCA in a single year."

In addition to what the current state of accredited facilities may be like inside its walls, many with high scores in this round have a history of prisoner neglect and poor conditions.

The den Detention Center in Texas was given 98.8 percent. In 2009, it was revealed that prisoners were drinking water contaminated with radium. Arizona's Saguaro Correctional Facility, the recipient of a 100 percent mark, had prisoners pulled out of it after allegations of abuse by guards and a prison riot.