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CCA Pays Over \$22,000 to American Correctional Association to Claim “Stamp of Approval” at Five Private Prisons

On July 9, private prison firm Corrections Corporation of America (CCA) announced that five of the company’s prisons had been recommended for re-accreditation by the American Correctional Association (ACA), which CCA described as a “stamp of approval.” CCA did not mention that it had paid over \$22,000 for those five accreditations, that CCA employees serve as ACA auditors, that CCA is a major sponsor of ACA events, or that ACA-accredited CCA facilities have experienced major security problems.

Nashville, TN (PRWEB) July 9, 2010 -- On July 9, private prison firm Corrections Corporation of America (CCA) announced that five of the company’s prisons had been recommended for re-accreditation by the American Correctional Association (ACA), which CCA described as a “stamp of approval.”

The ACA, a private non-governmental organization composed of current and former corrections employees, offers voluntary accreditation of detention facilities based on the ACA’s self-created standards. There is no oversight or regulation of the organization beyond its own staff.

It is disingenuous for CCA to describe ACA accreditation as a ‘stamp of approval’ when the ACA, a private organization that sets its own standards, accepts payments and donations from CCA.

The ACA’s president-elect, Davidson County, Tennessee Sheriff Daron Hall, is a former CCA program director, and at least two CCA employees serve as ACA auditors – CCA warden Todd Thomas and company vice president Dennis Bradby.

The ACA provides accreditation services to correctional agencies, both public and private, for a fee. As stated by the ACA, facilities that seek accreditation must “pay an accreditation fee.” The organization relies heavily on such fees. For example, in 2008 the ACA reported receiving more than \$3.83 million in accreditation fees – over 40% of the organization’s total revenue for that year. Facilities that fail accreditation can re-apply, and the ACA provides waivers for failure to meet certain accreditation standards.

According to a letter posted on the ACA’s website, effective as of January 1, 2009, the cost of accreditation is “\$3,000 per day, plus \$1,500 for each auditor on the audit team regardless of the size or type of facility.” Thus, at a minimum, CCA paid \$22,500 to the ACA in order to obtain re-accreditation at five of the company’s prisons as announced in CCA’s July 9 press release. Last year, CCA paid at least \$63,000 to have 13 of its facilities accredited.

ACA accreditation is based largely on documentation provided by the correctional agency being examined, and whether it has certain policies in place – not necessarily whether it follows those policies in practice. Thus, some ACA-accredited CCA facilities have experienced significant problems despite being accredited. For example, earlier this year two prisoners were murdered at CCA’s Saguaro Correctional Center in Eloy, Arizona, which is ACA accredited; CCA’s ACA-accredited Idaho Correctional Center is presently the subject of an ACLU class-action lawsuit that describes systemic violence condoned by CCA staff; and both Hawaii and Kentucky prison officials removed their female prisoners from the CCA-operated Otter Creek Correctional Center in Kentucky, which is also ACA accredited, following a sex abuse scandal in which six CCA employees were charged with sexually abusing or raping prisoners.

One former CCA employee, Donna Como, who served as an accreditation manager, candidly admitted that she helped falsify documents for an ACA audit. “I was the person who doctored the ACA accreditation reports for this company,” she stated in December 2008, referring to her employment at the CCA-operated Southern Nevada Women’s Correctional Facility.

In addition to the tens of thousands of dollars that CCA pays to the ACA for accreditation, CCA is also a major sponsor of the ACA’s biannual conferences. In August 2009, CCA sponsored the main banquet at the ACA’s 139th Congress of Corrections held in Nashville, Tennessee – where CCA is headquartered – and has been a major financial supporter of other ACA events. +

“CCA proclaims ACA accreditation of the company’s private, for-profit facilities as a badge of honor and an indication of the quality of CCA’s services,” said Alex Friedmann, president of the Private Corrections Institute and a former CCA prisoner. “Yet CCA basically buys accreditations by paying tens of thousands of dollars in fees, CCA employees serve as ACA auditors, and CCA is a major financial sponsor of the ACA’s conferences. It is disingenuous for CCA to describe ACA accreditation as a ‘stamp of

approval' when the ACA, a private organization that sets its own standards, accepts payments and donations from CCA. That is simply a stamp of CCA getting what it has paid for."

+ The Private Corrections Institute had a paid booth at the ACA convention in August 2009, where PCI members distributed literature opposing prison privatization.

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The Private Corrections Institute (PCI), www.privateci.org, is a non-profit citizen watchdog group that educates the public about the significant dangers and pitfalls associated with the privatization of correctional services. PCI maintains an online collection of news reports and other resources related to the private prison industry, and holds the position that for-profit prisons have no place in a free and democratic society.

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