

P R E S S R E L E A S E

CCA Shows True Colors, Concerns Upon Release of Idaho Prison Video

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For Immediate Release

Boise, ID – A video obtained by the Associated Press and released on November 30 shows a prisoner being savagely beaten by another inmate at the Idaho Correctional Center while prison staff look on but fail to intervene to stop the assault.

The facility is operated by Corrections Corporation of America (CCA), the nation's largest – and most often sued – private prison company. CCA is currently facing a federal lawsuit filed by the ACLU of Idaho that alleges rampant violence at the Idaho Correctional Center. The suit, filed earlier this year, seeks class-action status and cites “epidemic violence” at the facility that is “the direct result of, among other things, [CCA] officials turning a blind eye to the brutality, a prison culture that relies on the degradation, humiliation and subjugation of prisoners, a failure to discipline guards who intentionally arrange assaults and a reliance on violence as a management tool.”

The video footage released by the Associated Press shows prisoner Hanni Elabed being beaten by another inmate in full view of at least three CCA employees, who did not intervene. Elabed's assailant even took time to sit down and catch his breath before renewing the assault, with CCA staff looking on but taking no action to stop him. Elabed had reportedly asked for help from prison officials, telling them he had been threatened by other prisoners. Instead, CCA employees returned him to the same unit.

Elabed was beaten unconscious and left in a coma for three days; he suffered major injuries, including intracranial bleeding that left him with brain damage and cognitive disabilities. He filed a separate suit against CCA that settled under undisclosed terms. His family members, who spoke in an interview, were devastated by his injuries.

In response to the video of Elabed's beating, CCA said in a statement that the “release of the video poses an unnecessary security risk to our staff, the inmates entrusted to our care, and ultimately to the public.”

“That is utter nonsense,” stated Alex Friedmann, president of the Private Corrections Institute (PCI), a non-profit organization that opposes prison privatization, and a former prisoner who served time at a CCA-operated facility in the 1990s. “I've watched the video, and the only ‘unnecessary risk’ it poses is to CCA's liability in prisoner assault cases and to the notion that CCA employees are corrections professionals.”

“CCA's public relations staff needs remedial training,” Friedmann added. “Rather than try to minimize the fallout from the release of a video that shows callous disregard to an inmate's safety, CCA should take steps to ensure that the prisoners ‘entrusted to their care’ are safe, and that brutal assaults like the one shown in the video do not happen again while supposedly ‘well-trained’ CCA guards stand idly by.”

The seriousness of the situation at the Idaho Correctional Center is reflected by an ongoing FBI investigation into allegations of criminal conduct among CCA employees at the facility, said Friedmann.

“Evidently the FBI considers problems at the prison to be serious enough to warrant a formal investigation,” Friedmann noted, “while CCA is only concerned about public relations problems resulting from the release of a video that shows CCA employees ignoring a near-fatal assault on a prisoner.”

A 2008 review by the Associated Press found that the Idaho Correctional Center had a rate of violence three times higher than state prisons in Idaho. The CCA-run facility is accredited by the American Correctional Association (ACA), a private organization that provides accreditation to public and private correctional facilities for a fee, and which receives funding from private prison companies, including CCA.

“The fact that a private prison with such high levels of violence – that is facing both a class-action lawsuit and an investigation by the FBI – has received ACA accreditation raises serious questions about the credibility of the ACA and the accreditation process itself,” said PCI director Ken Kopczynski. Kopczynski noted that private prisons often pay lower wages than in the public sector, which results in much higher staff turnover; consequently, privately-run prisons tend to have less experienced staff.

The AP video is available at this link: www.youtube.com/watch?v=VW4K9DKgRhI

The Private Corrections Institute (PCI) is a non-profit Florida-based citizen watchdog organization that works to educate 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 detention facilities have no place in a free and democratic society. (www.privateci.org).

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