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Grassroots Leadership Releases Resource Guide on Jail, Prison, and Detention Center Privatization in Texas

Group adds voice to opposition of proposed private jail for Grayson County

AUSTIN, TX – Today, Grassroots Leadership releases the 2009 edition of “Considering a Private Jail, Prison or Detention Center? A Resource Packet for Community Members and Public Officials.” The report’s release coincides with a heated debate over jail privatization in Grayson County, Texas. Grassroots Leadership adds its voice to that of a growing number of Grayson County residents in opposition to a privately-run jail currently being considered by Grayson County Commissioners.

“Considering a Private Jail, Prison or Detention Center” is available at www.grassrootsleadership.org.

Grayson County Commissioners and County Judge Drue Bynum believe building a for-profit jail that is larger than the county needs will generate revenue. They want to house inmates from other jurisdictions and collect a per-diem rate. That formula has failed in other Texas towns when prisoners failed to materialize. In Littlefield, Texas, officials have not been able to fill a small jail they financed and constructed with revenue bonds. Last week, Littlefield’s bond rating was downgraded to junk status by a credit ratings firm, and the city has had to dip into its water and sewer fund to finance its debt obligation on the facility.

“The Littlefield experience shows that these private prison ventures are risky for taxpayers,” said Andrew Strong, a researcher who helped develop the guide. “Our guide exposes some of the major pitfalls and fallacies associated with for-profit prisons. We think Grayson Commissioners should table the private idea and start from scratch.”

Grassroots Leadership’s updated Resource Packet analyzes the economic impact of private prisons on Texas communities, offers alternatives to prison expansion, and compares the safety and conditions at private and government run prisons.

The guide includes a review of recent research on the economic impact of prison expansion by attorney and independent criminal justice policy analyst, Michele Deitch. Deitch states that, “The research concludes, quite stunningly, that prisons have no measurable positive impact on economic growth, and may even slow growth in some communities.”

Compared to public facilities, for-profit private prisons and jails have significantly higher rates of staff turnover, higher rates of escape, and higher rates of assault. For-profit prison companies train new hires inadequately and drive experienced jailers out of work by paying them wages as low as fast-food restaurants and grocery store chains. The report says that private prisons are associated with inadequate protection of prisoners’ human rights, degrading prison conditions, and poor employment standards.

According to Grassroots Leadership’s Nick Hudson, “News reports are replete with stories of mismanagement and abuse in private corrections facilities.” He went on to say that “It’s clear that privatization creates more challenges than benefits for those communities that open their doors to it.”

Grassroots Leadership is a 29 year-old Southern-based social justice organization working to transform the justice system by advocating for a community-based justice system and alternatives to incarceration. More information and a copy of this release are available at www.grassrootsleadership.org.

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