

Equal Justice Initiative

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://eji.org/news/justice-department-will-phase-out-private-prisons/>

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08.19.16

The Justice Department announced yesterday that it will phase out the use of private prisons, which fail to provide sufficient rehabilitative services, maintain adequate security, or save taxpayers money.

In a memo to the Bureau of Prisons (BOP), Deputy Attorney General Sally Q. Yates directed BOP to end or reduce private prison contracts as they come up for renewal. BOP recently declined to renew a 1200-bed contract, and yesterday, it reduced an existing contract from 10,800 beds to 3600.

BOP expects to stop housing inmates at three or more private facilities over the next year. By May 1, 2017, private prisons will house 14,200 federal inmates, down from nearly 30,000 in 2013.

Ms. Yates cited the Justice Department inspector generals recent findings that private prisons reported higher rates of assault, more uses of force, and more contraband than BOP facilities. In 2014 alone, the federal government spent \$639 million on private facilities, in payments to three companies: Corrections Corporation of America, GEO Group, and Management and Training Corp.

The federal prison population increased by almost 800 percent between 1980 and 2013, according to the Justice Department. Ten years ago, BOP began contracting with privately operated prisons to house some federal inmates. By 2013, private prisons housed about 15 percent of the federal prison population.

Since 2013, the department says, the federal prison population has declined from 220,000 to less than 195,000. This decline in the prison population means that we can better allocate our resources to ensure that inmates are in the safest facilities and receiving the best rehabilitative services services that increase their chances of becoming contributing members of their communities when they return from prison, Ms. Yates said in a statement.

Most incarcerated people in the United States are housed in state prisons, which do not fall under the Justice Departments policy. But the federal governments phasing out of private prisons could inspire state and local governments to follow suit.

This is an important step forward, said EJI director Bryan Stevenson. Private prisons and related private industries have incentives to keep Americas prison population unnecessarily high and have funded opposition to sensible reforms in order to maximize profits. States should follow the Justice Departments lead on this issue.

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Justice Department Statement

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