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Prison Canteen - Wisconsin Is Open For Business

This is a copy of a letter I sent to Makda Fessahaye on July 25, 2019 about the current and future prison canteen system.

I read your July 10, 2019 memo concerning the new canteen vendor. Since you are new to the DOC, you do not know the history of canteens in prisons. Until 2015, all prisons ran their own independent canteens. They ordered the best products at the best prices from multiple wholesale suppliers. All of the canteens were profitable, well-run and met the needs of the prisoners.

DOC officials in Madison forced the prisons to shut down their great canteen services and replace it with Keefe as the sole vendor. Prices are higher, product selection is worse and service is terrible. Let me give you some examples: I used to buy amino acids on canteen for \$5 per bottle; now I pay Marcus \$20 for essentially the same thing. I used to buy one pound boxes of raisins for \$2.98; now I pay \$2 for a 6-pack of 1/2 ounce boxes of raisins (3 ounces versus 16 ounces). I used to buy 24 oz. bottle of mouthwash for \$2.07; now I can't afford to pay \$6 for 8 or 16 oz. bottles of mouthwash. I haven't bought mouthwash in over a year.

You announced that you are switching to a different vendor who is going to charge us even more and provide fewer products. Neither Keefe nor Union Supply provide us with what we need to meet our needs and have priced many prisoners out of being able to purchase bare necessities. Worst of all, we have no input into what we are allowed to buy. There are thousands of items we could and should be able to have if not for the fact that you choose not to allow us to have them.

There is no rational reason why you have to continue to require all prisons to obtain their canteen from one vendor. Terminate the contract and return canteen in-house where it can be best operated. If nothing else, at least turn it over to BSI and let them order from multiple vendors or one low-cost vendor like Wal-Mart. There's no legitimate reason why prisoners and their families must help enrich the prison industrial complex.