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HARLAN RICHARDS

June 15, 2020

My recent letter to the DOC Canteen Committee:

June 11, 2020

Canteen Committee  
DAI/DOC  
P. O. Box 7925  
Madison, WI 53707

Dear Canteen Committee:

I wrote to the SCI canteen about both of these issues and did not get a satisfactory response.

USG [Union Supply, the DOC's authorized canteen vendor] discontinued the only decent deodorant (Mennon Sport Gel) available from canteen months ago and stated that there would be a replacement available on the new canteen list (February 2020). No new deodorant has been added. The only products left are substandard and/or unsuitable.

Instead, USG now offers brand name over-priced deodorant for our families to purchase. I asked a friend to compare USG prices with Wal-Mart prices:

Right Guard Extreme Ocean Rush Gel Deodorant (4 oz.)  
USG price: \$8.45.                      Wal-Mart price: \$3.88

Old Spice Classic Original Deodorant (3.65 oz.)  
USG price: \$7.90.                      Wal-Mart price: \$4.97

You are allowing USG to create a situation of scarcity for good deodorant and then allowing them to hold our families hostage by having to buy over-priced deodorant as the sole means of obtaining good deodorant. Are you doing this on purpose? Or are you unaware of what USG is doing? Why aren't the same products available in canteen [also] available to our family members? Why didn't you put these new products out to bid?

The second issue is that canteen has discontinued denture cleaning tablets. There is now no way that prisoners can obtain denture cleaning tablets for dentures or partial plates. Are you aware of this issue? If so, you must not have dentures or you would be aware that denture cleaning tablets are essential to good oral hygiene. Do you expect HSU to provide prisoners with denture cleaner? Their advice is to use hand soap. Really? Is this how you treat your grandmother? Tell her to use hand

soap on her dentures? Of course not! And neither should we be treated this way. If USG cannot provide what we need, then BSI should be obtaining it from a different vendor.

I'm sure you believe that the USG contract is working out very well. The reality is that it is the worst canteen that has ever been operated in a Wisconsin prison (I should know, I've been in prison for 35 years and have experienced many canteens). Your contract was not made with the best interests of the prisoners in mind. We are your clientele. Our needs should be your number one priority in negotiating a contract - not getting a big kickback, not creating another BSI shop and not making it easier on DOC staff who now process fewer out-of-stock refunds. By the way, there are more out of stock items now than ever before but there is no record of them because the system simply blocks prisoners from ordering them in the first place. It looks better on paper but in reality it is much worse.

Why don't prisoners have a voice in what items are offered through the canteen? When I was in Waupun many years ago I was on a canteen committee where prisoners and staff met together to select canteen items. Prisoners know what they want and need - staff don't have a clue. There are thousands of items available that we are allowed to have but which you will not allow us to buy simply because you don't want to. What kind of decision making is that? Making conditions in prison unnecessarily harsh just because you can serves no legitimate purpose. Prisoners are powerless to do anything about it but that doesn't mean they aren't aware of what you are doing.

Coffee is another example of giving us what you want us to have instead of what prisoners want or need. I had to give up drinking decaf coffee because the one available product is such low quality it is undrinkable. Have you checked to see how much of it is being purchased? Not much, I'll bet. It's disgusting.

You also sell two kinds of regular coffee, both of which are low-quality. When Keefe provided canteen at least their store brand was good coffee and they also offered name brand coffee. Why can't USG sell 8 oz. bags (or jars) of Folgers and Taster's Choice? What harm would it do to let prisoners buy a decent product at a fair price? USG handles those products - you are the ones not letting us have them.

I urge you to rethink your canteen policies and provide a canteen which meets the needs of the prisoners it serves.

Sincerely,

Harlan Richards

cc: Secretary Kevin Carr