

## DC JAIL HEALTHCARE CONTRACT AWARD “STUFF OF NIGHTMARES”

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On Monday December 8, the DC Office of Contracting and Procurement awarded the Jail healthcare contract to Corizon, a for-profit company with a troubled history in other states. Advocates expect the contract to be introduced at the last day of the legislative session of the DC Council, which is scheduled for Tuesday, December 16.

If the Council approves the contract, Corizon would be responsible for providing healthcare to over 10,000 DC residents who cycle through the DC Jail and Correctional Treatment Facility each year. Returning citizens, their families and advocates are urging the Council to reject the contract, citing concerns about lawsuits, investigations and fines that have dogged Corizon around the country.

In Virginia, Debbie Daley had to wait *eight months* after being diagnosed with colorectal cancer to receive treatment because of scheduling mistakes and transportation cancellations by Corizon. When she finally made it to the hospital, doctors found her body racked with a cancer-related infection. The doctor was so concerned she called the ethics board for guidance, and refused to discharge Ms. Daley back to Corizon. Because of Corizon’s neglect, Ms. Daley missed the opportunity to try to shrink the tumor so it could be operated on. Her cancer is terminal, and she received a compassionate release so she could die in a hospice.

In Arizona, in an eerily similar situation, Glen Huggins’ cancer went undiagnosed for months while Corizon nurses gave him antacid instead of the appropriate tests. Mr. Huggins could not swallow and lost 40 pounds before he was finally sent to a hospital. Within an hour, hospital staff diagnosed him with stage 4 esophageal cancer. Mr. Huggins was also granted compassionate release, and he died less than a week after going home.

“These lawsuits and investigations reveal one avoidable tragedy after another. This is the stuff of nightmares, not a model for the nation’s capital,” concluded Tammy Seltzer, Director of the DC Jail and Prison Advocacy Project at University Legal Services.

The health implications go beyond the well-being of those housed at the jail and CTF. Individuals cycle in and out of the jail, so the failure to properly treat communicable diseases--HIV or TB, for example--has dire consequences in the community.

Although patient care and community health are the top concerns, “states have experienced serious financial consequences,” observed Deborah Golden, Director of the DC Prisoners Project at the Washington Lawyers Committee. “In addition to the \$130 million annual contract, Arizona

had to pay \$3 million dollars to lawyers to defend the class action lawsuit they eventually had to settle. The District can't afford that kind of liability.”

Under the award, MBI Health would be providing mental health services as a subcontractor. Stakeholders have also expressed doubts about MBI’s ability to provide quality behavioral health, developing a poor track record as evidenced by oversight information submitted to the Committee on Health.

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