

FOLLOWING THE **MONEY**: CUI BONO REPORT

An analysis of who profits financially from
Canadian federal carceral institutions



By Lindsay Hunt and Karen Ridd



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Canadian Friends
Service Committee

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An Analysis of Who Profits Financially from Canadian Federal Carceral Institutions

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For Canadian Friends Service Committee (CFSC)

November 2025

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Introduction

Cui Bono (pronounced *kwee-boh-noh*) is a Latin phrase meaning “who benefits?” or “to whom is it of advantage?” While traditionally used in legal contexts to question who stands to gain from a particular action, this report applies the concept to the Canadian prison system. Our focus is largely on how federal institutions operated by Correctional Service Canada (CSC) generate financial benefits for private corporations. Among the many companies contracted by CSC, we focus on several of the largest recipients of CSC funding: McKesson Canada Corporation (pharmaceuticals), Paladin Technologies (surveillance), and Sysco (food services). We also examine one not-for-profit entity, the Canadian Corps of Commissioners, which provides security services. For provincially operated correctional facilities (that are funded by provincial governments), our analysis includes Synergy (telecommunications) and Bird Construction (infrastructure). While many of the issues identified in federal institutions are reflected within provincial facilities—and vice versa—this report primarily analyzes federal institutions and policies, with the aforementioned provincial examples included for perspective purposes.¹

To fully understand the current landscape, it is helpful to examine the historical context of federal institutions in Canada, tracing their origins and

¹ The focus on federal institutions is largely driven by the limited transparency surrounding the funding of provincial institutions. As discussed later in this paper, a potential direction for future research would be to examine the contracts awarded to corporations by provincial governments. Although federal contract data is already obscured through various mechanisms, publicly accessible information at the provincial level is even more scarce. Provincial data is frequently gatekept and highly fragmented, dispersed across numerous isolated sources rather than consolidated within a publicly accessible database.

evolution from the colonial period to the present. Following this, we will address the primary focus of this report, that is: Who *truly* benefits financially from the Canadian prison system? It is particularly important to note that since prisons and jails are funded by tax dollars, it is the public who is paying to enrich these corporations. Many might assert that society benefits because incarceration supposedly increases public safety. However, this notion is challenged by research, which indicates that locking away more individuals does not actually contribute to creating safer communities. Studies show that “custodial sanctions have no effect on reoffending or slightly increase it compared to non-custodial measures like probation” (Petrich et al., 2021, p.1). Furthermore, a prevailing sentiment in the research is that “we find no conditions under which custody reduces reoffending” (Petrich et al., 2021, p.1). This raises the question: if incarceration is ineffective at increasing public safety or rehabilitating or deterring people (the stated goals of the carceral system), then why do we as a society continue to rely on incarceration as a way of responding to crime? One part of that answer is this: there are individuals and corporations who make significant profits from the incarceration of people. Acknowledging and addressing this reality is one piece of the puzzle—one step towards weaning ourselves as a society off of carceral and punitive responses to harm and wrongdoing.

Norwegian criminologist Nils Christie (2016) was one of the first scholars to argue that modern criminal justice systems must be understood through a critical political-economic lens. In *Crime Control as Industry: Towards Gulags, Western Style*, Christie showed that the expansion of policing and prisons serves not only to

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maintain class hierarchies but also to channel public resources into the hands of bureaucratic and corporate actors. His framing of crime control as an industry helps clarify the central question of this report. By extending Christie’s insights to the Canadian context, we see how contracts, construction, and surveillance have turned punishment itself into a site of profit.

In a 2021 article, Canadian journalist Justin Ling shared a reflection from politician Michael Ignatieff: “I worked in a prison when I was a younger graduate student. I worked with lifers. One thing I know about prison: It’s that prison makes almost everybody worse who’s in there” (as cited in Ling, 2021, para.1). This perspective underscores the ongoing debate about the efficacy of prisons. If they are not achieving their intended purpose, we must ask: Why do we continue to incarcerate more individuals, employ more officers, build more institutions, and increase surveillance? The answer is that the Canadian prison system is structured in a way that prioritizes profit and punishment over rehabilitation and public safety.

Through the lens of Cui Bono—who benefits?—this report explores how systemic failures, privatization, and inequities harm persons who are incarcerated,² marginalized communities, and society. We also highlight the entities that are making significant profits off of this failed system, and provide some reflections on effective alternatives.

² It is important, when writing about carceral issues, to consider the language that we use. Terms like “convict,” “inmate,” “offender,” or “prisoner” not only reinforce negative stereotypes, but also suggest a fixed or static state, an essential aspect of one’s being. For this paper we have chosen to follow the example of ability rights activists and use “people first” language: “people [or persons] who are incarcerated.” Ideally, we would use the term “people who are currently incarcerated” throughout this report, as that suggests a temporary condition, not a state of being. The awkwardness of that term, however, has led us to choose the marginally more readable “people [or persons] who are incarcerated.” We would invite our readers to insert “currently” in their minds as you read this term. The term “inmate” or “offender” will appear only when directly quoting sources that use those terms.

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Challenges

Before delving deeper, it is essential to recognize the challenges in researching and writing this report. Acknowledging the key obstacles restricting access to certain information is vital for transparency.

- **Lack of transparency in financial reporting:** This poses one of the biggest challenges in crafting this report. Many companies fail to present accessible and transparent financial records. For example, two of the corporations mentioned in this report are Paladin Technologies and McKesson Canada Corporation (and its U.S. parent company, McKesson Corporation). Paladin Technologies is privately owned and is not required to disclose key financial information publicly. Although McKesson Corporation does share details about its U.S. finances, it lacks direct financial transparency related to its Canadian operations, creating a gap in the available reporting and data. While some finance websites publish apparent earnings of certain companies, the information is not verified and therefore not included in this report.
- **Limited access to specific data on persons who are incarcerated:** A further challenge in evaluating the effectiveness of programs within CSC is the limited access to data regarding persons who are incarcerated. For instance, privacy and confidentiality regulations understandably and correctly restrict public access to the mental health information of persons who are incarcerated. The lack of detailed statistics or case studies on mental health outcomes, however, complicates drawing firm conclusions regarding the effectiveness of existing programs. Furthermore, much of the available data is aggregated at the

institutional level rather than focusing on the needs and issues of particular individuals.

- **Lack of access to detailed contract information:** Securing specific details regarding contracts between CSC and private contractors is another challenge. While details on contract spending are available (to a certain extent), the specific terms and conditions of these contracts are often not disclosed. Moreover, the contracts often lack clarity regarding the services provided to CSC. Contracts include line items such as “Institutional Buildings” or “Consulting,” without specifying the institutions involved or the nature of the work performed. Many companies also use a ‘numbered name’ in the contract details, obscuring their identities in public records. This lack of detail severely limits the ability to evaluate how funds are allocated. Therefore, while the research presented here is comprehensive, it is not exhaustive. Readers are encouraged to explore the topic further beyond this report. All utilized resources are listed in our “References.”
- **Inconsistencies in government data:** In this report we have relied on data from the Open Government portal, a site that **should** provide consistent and accurate data. Unfortunately, while fact-checking our original data, we discovered a disturbing anomaly. The dataset on this important government site is inconsistent; it shows wildly varying data when accessed at different times.³ We

³ We have double-checked the data seven times using the same methodology, and each time the results have differed (see the Appendix for screenshots of the datasets illustrating these discrepancies). Furthermore, officials from the Canadian government have been unable to explain why the data continues to change. When we reached out for clarification, they were not only unable to provide an explanation but also failed to direct us to the appropriate contact who could address our concerns.

therefore have concerns not only about the reliability of the data provided by the government on their contracts and expenditures but also, more profoundly, about government accountability and veracity in reporting.

Federal Institutions in Canada: A Brief History

Early Penal System and Colonial Roots

Canada's current correctional system can be traced back to the colonial era. Initially, it was not created for rehabilitation or the public's welfare but instead focused on preserving social order and upholding power structures established during colonial times. The early penal system primarily benefited the state and elite classes by managing marginalized groups without providing meaningful assistance to persons who were incarcerated, or even to the people who had been harmed by criminal behaviour. Before Confederation in 1867, the penal system mirrored British practices, prioritizing punishment over rehabilitation. The dominant view held that inflicting pain and humiliation would discourage criminal activity. As a result, punishments included whipping, flogging, branding, public humiliation, and even execution. Actual prisons were scarce, while makeshift jails connected to courthouses often contained individuals charged with various offences, enduring harsh and unsanitary conditions. These approaches ensured that the prison system acted more as a means of social control than as a method for reform.

A New Era: Kingston Penitentiary

The creation of Kingston Penitentiary in 1835 represented Canada's first significant move towards organized incarceration (Correctional Service Canada,

2014). Although theoretically it aimed to foster rehabilitation through religious teachings (the carceral system has always been an upholder of “morality,” as defined at the time by those in power) and structured settings, the system primarily upheld existing societal hierarchies. Persons who were incarcerated faced strenuous labour under severe conditions, ensuring their work benefited institutional objectives rather than personal rehabilitation. Indeed, as we will discuss later in this report, prison labour continues to be used to meet institutional objectives rather than rehabilitative ones. The government gained—and still gains—access to low-cost labour while persons who were incarcerated suffered conditions that often left them worse off than they had been prior to incarceration.

By the late 19th century, Canada began to differentiate between its federal and provincial prison systems, classifying persons who were incarcerated based on the severity of their offences (Correctional Service Canada, 2014). Despite the rise of reformist ideas, methods like solitary confinement and enforced silence show that Canadian carceral institutions have continued to be focused more on control than on rehabilitation. The introduction of parole in the early 20th century offered a limited opportunity for reform, often used merely to reduce overcrowding rather than to meet the needs of persons who were incarcerated.

20th-Century Reforms and Commissions

In the 1930s, heightened public concern over the inhumane conditions in prisons led to the establishment of the Royal Commission of Inquiry, chaired by Justice Joseph Archambault. This Commission recommended strategies focused on crime prevention through youth programs, humane treatment, and skill

development in order to aid persons who were incarcerated to be able to reintegrate into society upon release (Archambault, 1938). The Archambault Commission's focus on prevention shows significant foresight. Canadian academic and criminologist Irvin Waller (2019) has written extensively on evidence-based solutions for effectively reducing violent crime; investing in youth programs and job creation rank high on his list of solutions. Unfortunately, the Archambault Commission recommendations faced obstacles in implementation due to systemic inertia, insufficient political will, and the impending challenges posed by World War II.

Subsequent reviews, such as the 1956 Fauteux Report, echoed earlier calls for meaningful reform, yet the Canadian prison system continued to prioritize centralized control, punitive practices, and cost-cutting strategies. This pattern illustrates a recurring issue: reform initiatives have consistently been overshadowed by the institution's drive for self-preservation (Petrich et al., 2021).

Even today, many current prison conditions reflect the concerns raised by Archambault and Fauteux in the mid-20th century; although overt physical punishment has largely diminished, the system often continues to emphasize punitive approaches over rehabilitation. In response to ongoing criticism, the federal government sought to create greater consistency by establishing CSC in the latter half of the twentieth century to standardize federal prison operations and rehabilitation practices.

The Birth of Correctional Service Canada (CSC)

Overview and Establishment

CSC succeeded the Canadian Penitentiary Service and was formally established in 1979 under the Department of the Solicitor General of Canada, now known as Public Safety Canada. Its main goal was to centralize and standardize the management of federal correctional facilities and programs. This merger aimed to improve efficiency and ensure consistent services for persons who are incarcerated, including education, rehabilitation, and parole management. Although CSC's mandate ideally suggests a balance between public safety and rehabilitation, a closer look indicates that the system often prioritizes political agendas, corporate interests, and institutional stability, frequently sacrificing the welfare and public good of those who are incarcerated, their families, and therefore society as a whole (McElligott, 2017).

Responsibilities

CSC manages minimum, medium, and maximum-security prisons, as well as parole and community reintegration initiatives. Its duties encompass various complex needs, such as security, healthcare, mental health assistance, and vocational training. Nevertheless, this concentration of authority has led to inefficiencies and disparities. For example, while ample resources are devoted to security and surveillance, critical aspects like physical health, mental health and reintegration are often neglected and inadequately funded. These priorities show an emphasis on institutional control rather than on fostering rehabilitation for persons who are incarcerated or for enhancing community results (Miranda, 2024).

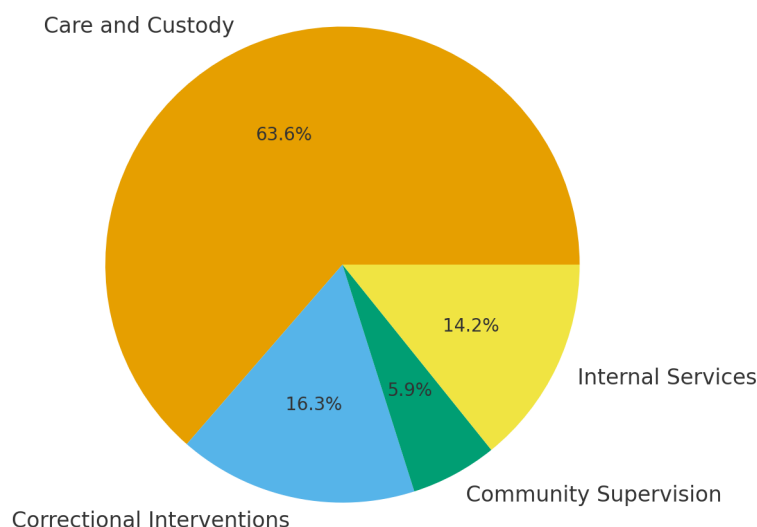
Funding and Budget Allocation

The Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness allocates funding to CSC through federal tax revenues derived from various sources, including personal and corporate income taxes, the Goods and Services Tax (GST), Employment Insurance (EI) premiums, the carbon tax, tariffs, and excise taxes on alcohol and tobacco. Taxpayers, as the primary contributors to CSC's budget—totaling \$3.17 billion for the 2024–2025 fiscal year—play a pivotal role in sustaining the agency's operations. This significant public investment prompts critical reflection on who ultimately benefits from taxpayer-funded corrections (Correctional Service Canada, 2024e).

CSC employs approximately 18,000 staff members nationwide and allocates its budget across four primary categories for the 2024 to 2025 fiscal year:

- **Care and Custody:** \$2.02 billion was designated for security, safety, and daily living requirements like food and basic accommodations.
- **Correctional Interventions:** \$516.9 million was allocated for supportive programming, including case management, chaplaincy services, Elder services, education initiatives, and CORCAN programs.
- **Community Supervision:** \$187.8 million for community resources, including halfway houses, community health services, and collaborative partnerships during reintegration.
- **Internal Services:** \$449.1 million for administrative delivery, such as financial and legal services, and communication.

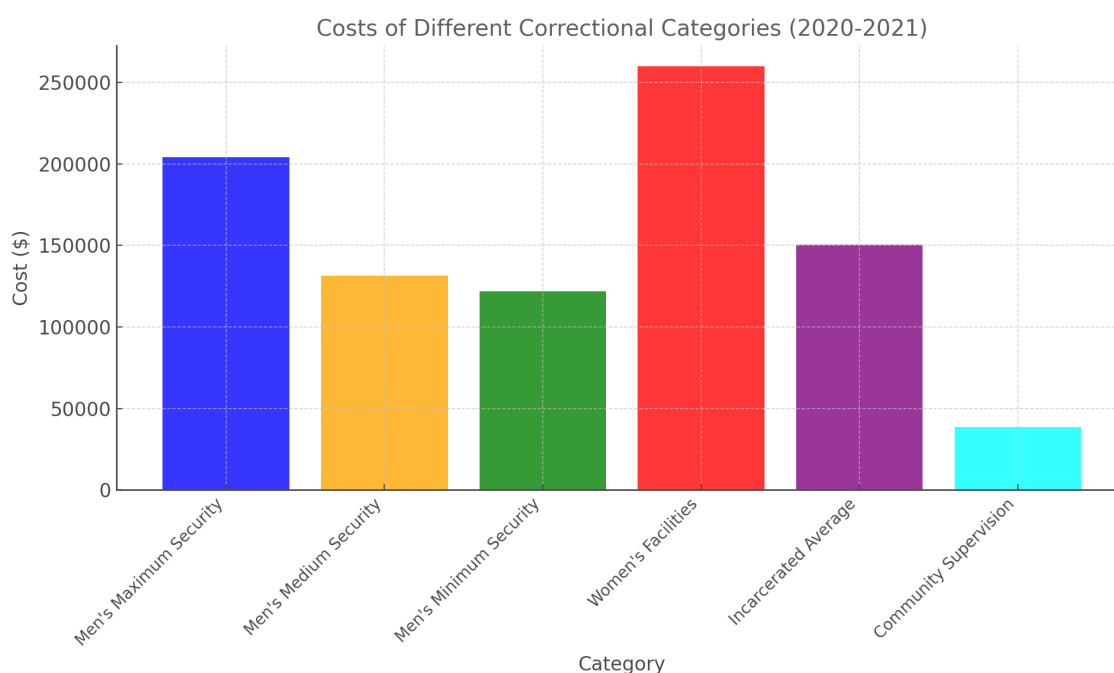
CSC Planned Spending Distribution (2024–2025)



The pie chart illustrating CSC’s planned spending for 2024–2025 reveals that the largest share of funding, approximately 63.6%, is allocated to Care and Custody, indicating that the greatest financial benefits accrue to stakeholders tied to institutional operations such as correctional officers, facility maintenance personnel, and suppliers. Correctional Interventions, receiving about 16.3% of the budget, benefit program facilitators, educators, and case managers. Internal Services account for 14.2% of spending and support administrative personnel, policy developers, and corporate service teams responsible for organizational oversight and continuity. In contrast, Community Supervision receives only 5.9%, reflecting comparatively lower prioritization of stakeholders involved in parole services, halfway houses, and community reintegration efforts. Overall, the spending distribution underscores a system that heavily prioritizes institutional custodial operations over community-based reintegration initiatives.

The Cost of Incarceration

A report from Public Safety Canada (2022) indicates that in 2016-2017, the annual cost of incarcerating one person averaged \$116,473. By 2021, this figure increased to \$150,505. In comparison, supporting an individual in the community in 2021 incurred a yearly expense of about \$38,418, an annual cost that is 74.5% lower. The chart illustrates a direct correlation between higher security levels and increased costs.⁴



According to these numbers, people who are incarcerated in maximum security facilities designated for males cost \$73,000 more compared to those in medium security and over \$82,000 more than those in minimum security. People who are

⁴ The authors acknowledge that the increased cost of incarceration during the COVID-19 pandemic reflects not only inflationary pressures but also the heightened expenditures associated with implementing health and safety measures within correctional facilities (such as enhanced sanitation, personal protective equipment, staffing challenges, and operational adjustments). However, despite the easing of pandemic-specific conditions, the elevated cost levels have largely persisted, suggesting a structural shift in correctional expenditures rather than a temporary surge.

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incarcerated in federal institutions designated for women incur the highest costs, totaling \$259,654 annually. The high cost of incarcerating people may come as a surprise to many Canadians, especially given that the average annual income in Canada is a little over \$60,000 (MadeInCanada). Another statistic that may come as a surprise is that it costs significantly more to incarcerate someone in a penitentiary designated for women than it does to incarcerate someone in a penitentiary designated for men.⁵ This discrepancy is due to the economics of scale (because so many more people are incarcerated in prisons designated for men, than there are in prisons designated for women, institutions designated for men are much larger and therefore more “cost-effective”). It is compounded by the fact that most people who are incarcerated who identify as female have themselves been recipients of significant violence (and therefore have additional emotional, physical, and mental health complexities), and the reality that female-identifying people who are incarcerated often resort to self-harming. Rates of self-harming behaviour tend to be higher in institutions designated for women than in those designated for men. The institutional response to such behaviour often involves placing the individual in isolation—a measure that can be both counterproductive to rehabilitation and more costly to administer.

In 2021, institutional (prison) staff comprised 76% of CSC’s workforce, while community staff, including parole and community supervision, comprised just 8.7%. The significant disparity highlights CSC’s priorities. Custody centers (including prisons and remand facilities) incur ongoing operational expenses and require

⁵ The authors of this paper would like to acknowledge the very binary nature of these statistics, and their unfortunate erasure of gender non-conforming people who are caught up in the carceral system. Canadian Friends Service Committee



round-the-clock staffing, making them far more resource-intensive than other options. In contrast, community-based supervision often faces budget constraints despite being more cost-efficient and achieving better outcomes in reducing recidivism. Traditionally, correctional systems have operated on the belief that incarceration is the primary response to criminal behaviour (Chan et al., 2017). Although there have been recent shifts towards rehabilitation, staffing levels and resource distribution have not been adjusted to reflect this change in approach. This highlights a significant policy gap, as governments have yet to fully adopt alternatives to imprisonment.

Furthermore, while both institutional staff and community supervision workers benefit from employment opportunities generated by incarceration, the advantages are significantly greater for institutional staff, particularly in regions with high incarceration rates (McElligott, 2017). However, these employment benefits often come at a personal cost, as institutional staff experience high levels of burnout and stress due to the demanding and often traumatic nature of their work. The continued heavy investment in incarceration, despite its limited success in rehabilitation and its considerable toll on staff well-being, can be attributed to a combination of historical context, economic incentives, and political interests (Perrin, 2023).

A rarely examined component of this political economy involves the unions representing correctional officers and jail staff. These organizations frequently function as entities that demand ever-greater resources and loyalty from both their members and the state (Coser, 1974). In the correctional context, guard unions often lobby for higher wages, expanded staffing, and increased investment in security infrastructure and surveillance technology. Although nominally part of organized labour, they typically oppose decarceration initiatives and resist reforms that would reduce prison populations. In this sense, their interests align more closely with institutional expansion than with social justice, reinforcing the fiscal and political drivers of incarceration.

The Revolving Door

When incarceration is used without providing meaningful rehabilitation or addressing the systemic conditions that contribute to criminalization, it does not resolve harm but instead contributes to a steady expansion of the prison population. Individuals who leave prison without adequate support often return to environments shaped by poverty, discrimination, and limited opportunity, increasing the likelihood of re-contact with the justice system.

Public Safety Canada echoes this in their recent report on recidivism, stating:

Reintegration remains a significant challenge for many individuals leaving correctional institutions as they often struggle to find stable housing, secure employment, and reconnect with their communities. For instance, approximately 30% of individuals released from federal and provincial correctional institutions experience homelessness within the first two years

of their release. Without access to essential supports, the risk of reoffending increases, ultimately impacting community safety (2025 Progress Report on the Federal Framework to Reduce Recidivism, 2025, para.4).

Furthermore, as more people are cycled back into custody, governments allocate increasing funds to maintain and expand correctional facilities, reinforcing a costly infrastructure that becomes difficult to scale back. In this way, incarceration becomes a mechanism that sustains its own growth, directing public resources toward containment rather than prevention or community support. The result is a self-reinforcing loop in which rising imprisonment fuels further spending, entrenching a system that continues to expand even as it fails to produce long-term social wellbeing.

Impact of Political Agendas

CSC's budget is revised each year primarily based on political priorities and public perception. During the tenure of the Conservative Party of Canada under Stephen Harper, "tough on crime" policies significantly increased prison construction funding to expand the carceral capacity nationwide (Comack et al., 2015). More specifically, the government spent \$601 million to add 2,700 beds across more than 30 existing federal penitentiaries, even as approximately 1,000 beds were lost with the closure of Kingston Penitentiary and Leclerc Institution (Piché, 2012). While this 'strategy' may satisfy political motivations to gain public support, it fails to provide a viable solution to crime. Under Justin Trudeau, the Liberal government responded to the fallout of Harper's policies by expanding and modernizing infrastructure and increasing staffing levels (Gerster, 2019). However, despite this

shift in emphasis, neither administration meaningfully addressed the mental health and addiction challenges within prisons or the broader community issues that often contribute to criminalization and incarceration. Ultimately, both governments prioritized institutional stability over confronting deeper systemic problems.

The “Tough on Crime” Era

Policies and Legislative Changes

The Harper government’s (2006-2015) “tough on crime” measures were presented as a way to enhance public safety and tackle criminal behaviours (Comack et al., 2015). Policies, including mandatory minimum sentences, limited parole options through the Truth in Sentencing Act of 2009, and increased penalties for drug offences under the Safe Streets and Communities Act of 2012, emphasized punishment over rehabilitation (Chan et al., 2017). In addition to these punitive legal reforms, the 2012 Deficit Reduction Action Plan (DRAP) sought to return to a balanced federal budget through widespread spending cuts, including a \$295 million reduction to CSC’s operating budget (Comack et al., 2015). Under DRAP, three penitentiaries were closed, food services were modernized, and persons who were incarcerated were required to shoulder greater financial responsibility for their imprisonment through increased room and board charges and the elimination of incentive pay (Fitzpatrick, 2012). These austerity-driven policies intensified pressures on an already overburdened correctional system, reflecting the government’s prioritization of fiscal restraint over rehabilitation and reintegration. Consequently, between 2006 and 2011, federal prison expenses surged around 86%,

escalating from \$1.6 billion to \$2.98 billion (McElligott, 2017). Harper's administration invested heavily in prison expansion initiatives, claiming they would provide economic stability for local communities. However, this claim largely fell short, as few local businesses secured contracts for prison construction. Instead, large corporations enjoyed profitable government contracts. Consequently, private companies benefited significantly while communities were burdened with larger prisons that failed to curb crime or foster substantial economic development (McElligott, 2017).

Long-Term Consequences

None of these policies led to safer streets or communities. Research indicates that strategies like those employed during Harper's administration raise recidivism rates instead of preventing crime (Deshman, 2022; Perrin, 2023). Benjamin Perrin, who previously served as a policy advisor to the Harper government, later reconsidered his support for these policies. A turning point for Perrin came from a 2018 letter by an unnamed Indigenous man held in a B.C. prison: "If you want to turn a man into an animal, put him in a cage without the resources to build him back up" (as cited in Walls, 2023). This prompted Perrin to write his book, *Indictment: The Criminal Justice System on Trial*, wherein he acknowledges that the "tough on crime" policies he once vigorously promoted have proven to be counterproductive. In an interview with the *National Post*, Perrin expressed contrition, stating: "I deeply regret those past actions and now recognize these laws disproportionately impacted marginalized communities without making Canadians any safer" (Perrin, as cited in Ivison, 2023). The human toll of these policies was profound. With limited access to Canadian Friends Service Committee

mental health care and rehabilitation services, people who were incarcerated faced conditions that significantly hindered their opportunities for successful reintegration into society (Ling, 2019; Perrin, 2023).

Incarceration rates in Canada have remained relatively stable overall, despite rising during the Harper administration (Statistics Canada, 2025). However, the incarceration of marginalized populations—particularly Indigenous peoples—has increased significantly (Department of Justice Canada, 2018). Prisons expanded in this era not because crime rates rose, but because punishment did (MacDonald, 2016; Zinger, 2016). Political priorities, institutional inertia, and economic interests combined to sustain—and even grow—the carceral infrastructure despite declining crime (McElligott, 2017). During this period, CSC increasingly depended on private firms to meet the demands of the system it had built, solidifying connections with national and international corporations (McElligott, 2017). Numerous companies exploited CSC’s growth, profiting from policies that continued to harm those caught within the prison system. This points us to a central irony regarding incarceration in Canada. An increasing number of prisons in the United States are fully privatized. There are obviously significant problems with a private model for incarceration, especially the emphasis on cost-cutting and profit-making, and the subsequent lack of focus on rehabilitation and healing. Since Canada’s carceral system is public, it’s tempting for Canadians to sigh with relief and say some version of, “At least we aren’t as bad as the United States!” Unfortunately, however, this attitude both serves to exonerate Canadians from a sense of responsibility for the problems that do exist in our system and is also disingenuous. Yes, Canadian prisons and jails are public

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institutions, however, many of the services have been privatized—with all the concurrent problems faced by those in the U.S. system.

The “tough on crime” approach emerged as a compelling political narrative, allowing Harper’s government to position itself as a protector of public safety (Comack et al., 2015). Unfortunately, as noted earlier, this narrative has disproportionately affected Indigenous and Black communities, who have endured—and continue to endure—the consequences of these harsh and inequitable policies (Public Safety Canada, 2023b). The statistics speak for themselves. According to CBC News, in 2022, “Black prisoners represent[ed] 9.2 per cent of the total incarcerated population despite representing only about 3.5 per cent of the overall Canadian population.” Moreover, while Indigenous people make up only 5% of the population of Canada, they comprise over 30% of the total prison population, and over 50% of women who are incarcerated are Indigenous (2022). The Harper government’s mandatory minimum sentences and limited parole options entrapped individuals in cycles of incarceration for minor offences while politicians maintained an image of strictness against crime (Perrin, 2023). Systemic inequities were relegated to a mere afterthought, while political gains were prioritized.⁶

A Shift in Narrative?

Although Harper’s government was defeated by the Liberals under Justin Trudeau in 2015, its policies have had a lasting influence. In 2021, the Trudeau administration repealed specific mandatory minimum sentences and sought to

⁶ As of this writing, politicians from both the Canadian Liberal and Conservative parties have recently voiced support for both strict “tough on crime” and “jail not bail” measures, measures that would inevitably increase the number of people currently incarcerated.

promote rehabilitation. Nonetheless, the structural and financial strategies set during Harper's tenure remain (Gerster, 2019). CSC's budget remains focused on sustaining incarceration rather than on providing rehabilitative supports such as mental health services, addiction support, or restorative justice programs. Consequently, the priority of institutional sustainability and corporate profits continues to overshadow initiatives aimed at fostering safer communities and enhancing outcomes for persons who are incarcerated (Perrin, 2023).

Private Contracts: Who Truly Benefits?

The Role of Private Contractors

Many Canadians may not be aware of the significant financial benefits that individuals and corporations derive from the maintenance and expansion of prisons in Canada. CSC contracts private firms that submit bids, usually opting for the lowest cost. While this approach may seem to make efficient use of taxpayer money, it still raises an important question: Who genuinely benefits from this expenditure? What entities or companies are making profit from the caging of people?

The growing privatization of correctional services in Canada reflects broader dynamics long observed in the U.S. American scholars and activists have referred to this interlocking web of state and corporate interests as the prison-industrial complex (Davis, 2003; Gilmore, 2007). As mentioned earlier, while Canada's facilities remain publicly operated, many of the same economic logics apply: governments outsource essential functions, corporations secure recurring revenue streams, and incarceration itself becomes normalized as an economic growth strategy. Critiques

of the prison-industrial complex remind us that public-private boundaries often obscure rather than prevent profit-making within systems of punishment.

CSC grants thousands of private contracts yearly, ranging from tens of thousands to millions of dollars. This growing dependence on private companies within a public institution, such as CSC, prompts serious concerns regarding the priorities of Canada's prison system. By outsourcing critical services to profit-oriented companies, the system fosters an environment where corporate interests often precede the welfare of persons who are incarcerated, and therefore the potential success of rehabilitation initiatives (McElligott, 2017).

To set a manageable scope for this section of the report, all contracts from January 2022 to November 2024 were retrieved from the Government of Canada website (Government Contracts Over \$10,000, n.d.). Because the Government of Canada is only required to disclose private contracts exceeding \$10,000, smaller contracts are excluded, as the information is not widely available. The dataset was then exported and the frequency of contracts and their total value were calculated. This analysis provides a clearer picture of the companies and entities benefiting from these contracts, while highlighting the scale and pace of their profits.

Financial Impact and The Welfare of Persons Who Are Incarcerated

From January 2022 to November 2024, CSC granted over 13,000 contracts to external companies and organizations, amounting to over \$3.6 billion (Government Contracts Over \$10,000, n.d.). These contracts encompassed a range of goods and services, including surveillance technology and implementation, transportation, pharmaceuticals and medical supplies, food provisions, and facility maintenance.

Major recipients included McKesson Canada Corporation, Paladin Technologies, Sysco Foods, and the Canadian Corps of Commissioners, each of which received contracts totaling millions of dollars. It is important to note that the figures discussed in this section are based on data published by the Government of Canada and reflect the information available at the time of our original research in December 2024. Because contract information is released quarterly and may be updated as amendments occur, the dataset should represent the best available snapshot, not a final or exhaustive accounting of all contract expenditures. According to the Government of Canada's *Search Government Contracts Over \$10,000* portal, there is typically a four- to five-month publication delay. As the dataset for this report was finalized in December 2024, contracts issued later in the year may be absent, and the totals presented may therefore not represent the complete record for that period. However, as noted on pages 9-10 of this report, the database also produced highly inconsistent results.

McKesson Canada Corporation

During the allotted time period, McKesson Canada Corporation was granted contracts totalling over \$215 million for pharmaceutical and medicinal supplies (Government Contracts Over \$10,000, n.d.). McKesson Canada Corporation is owned by its parent company, McKesson Corporation, which is based in the U.S.

In 2014, troubling news came to light that Canadian prisons were over-prescribing psychotropic medications to persons who were incarcerated, especially to persons who were incarcerated in institutions designated for women (Sawa, 2014). As can easily be imagined, this practice means that people run the risk

of developing addictions *while incarcerated*. What happens to these people upon release? How will they feed the addictions that were created while incarcerated? This is particularly alarming given that persons who are federally incarcerated are removed from provincial healthcare systems, and there can be a lag in reinstating them upon release. No specific corporation has been named or held responsible for the over-medication of persons who were incarcerated. What we do know is that McKesson Canada Corporation has held contracts with CSC since at least 2014 (Government Contracts Over \$10,000, n.d.). When this news came to light, Canada's then-Correctional Investigator Howard Sapers expressed significant concerns about the use of quetiapine—both off-label and branded—in correctional systems (Sawa, 2014). Common side effects of this medication include sedation, fatigue, and drowsiness. CBC uncovered a document showing that in 2013, 63% of people incarcerated in federal facilities designated for women were prescribed psychotropic medications (Sawa, 2014). This finding aligns with anecdotal evidence gathered by the authors from persons with lived experience of incarceration. There is a long-standing link between the over-prescription of medications and the inefficacy of alternative mental health treatments (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, 2020). Medicating persons who are incarcerated often acts as an easy “solution” to a deeper, systemic problem (Sawa, 2014). Despite CSC's supposed efforts over the past decade to enhance mental healthcare, it still struggles to meet the increasing mental health needs of persons who are incarcerated, which often worsen due to the prison environment (Health Canada, 2020). Additionally, persons who did not have

mental health issues prior to imprisonment can develop such issues whilst inside, due to the stresses of incarceration.

McKesson Canada Corporation is among several pharmaceutical distributors named in a nationwide class-action lawsuit launched in British Columbia (B.C.), which alleges that these companies contributed to and profited from the opioid crisis (Bronskill & Greer, 2024). The lawsuit seeks to recover public healthcare costs related to opioid addiction and misuse across Canada. McKesson Corporation, the U.S.-based parent company of McKesson Canada Corporation, has also been named in a similar lawsuit in the U.S. (Arshad, 2024). Although it is unclear which specific pharmaceuticals McKesson Canada Corporation supplies to carceral institutions, the combination of ongoing lawsuits against both the Canadian subsidiary and its U.S. parent, along with established evidence of over-prescription of sedatives in prisons, raise legitimate concerns about potential involvement in the over-medication of persons who are incarcerated in Canada. Despite this, persons who are incarcerated continue to face inadequate access to meaningful mental health care and may be prescribed sedatives in place of appropriate therapeutic support. Financially, McKesson Canada Corporation and McKesson Corporation continue to generate substantial profits, reporting consolidated annual revenues in the hundreds of billions of dollars (McKesson, 2024a). Even while paying billions in opioid-related settlements, the company remains highly profitable from the distribution of pharmaceuticals, including controlled substances. This contrast underscores a troubling reality: while corporations like McKesson Canada Corporation and McKesson Corporation benefit immensely from drug sales, persons Canadian Friends Service Committee

who are incarcerated are left with insufficient care and often receive medication as a substitute for genuine mental health support.

To be clear, it is crucial that persons who are incarcerated receive any medications they need. The concerns here are that there is evidence of over-medication with psychotropic drugs, that the primary supplier of pharmaceuticals to federal institutions appears to be McKesson Canada Corporation (a company currently sued over the over-prescription of opioids), that its parent company is not based in Canada (and thus may have little regard for the well-being of Canadian society), and that while doing so, it made \$309 billion in the 2024 fiscal year alone (McKesson, 2024a). Only a portion of those profits would have come from Canadian taxpayers through sales to the Canadian government. Nevertheless, it is evident that McKesson Corporation is highly profitable for itself, its shareholders, and its CEO, who received a total target compensation of \$18.9 million in the 2024 fiscal year, according to McKesson's 2024 Proxy Statements (McKesson, 2024b).

Paladin Technologies

Paladin Technologies, a major player in the security and surveillance industry, was awarded \$18 million to provide surveillance services during this period. In 2023, the company was acquired by Bosch Building Technologies, a division of the multinational German conglomerate Bosch Global, thereby integrating Paladin into a vast corporate infrastructure that spans Europe and North America (Paladin Technologies, 2023). This acquisition underscores the increasing globalization and

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consolidation of the prison surveillance industry, where international corporations now profit from monitoring incarcerated populations. Within correctional institutions, surveillance is not merely a tool for safety—it is often a constant force that shapes daily life. Modern prisons rely heavily on cameras, biometric tracking, and monitoring technologies, contributing to an environment where persons who are incarcerated are subject to continuous observation. Research consistently demonstrates that such excessive monitoring generates chronic psychological stress, heightens anxiety, and undermines autonomy (Miranda, 2024). When individuals feel they have no personal space or freedom of movement, their sense of dignity and agency is eroded. This constant scrutiny often damages trust between persons who are incarcerated and correctional staff, further weakening the possibility of cooperative and rehabilitative relationships. The psychological strain of constant surveillance is compounded by its social consequences. Studies show that pervasive monitoring discourages authentic social interactions, as individuals fear being misinterpreted or punished for even minor expressions of frustration or solidarity (Miranda, 2024). As social bonds weaken, aggression can emerge as one of the few remaining forms of self-expression, exacerbating tensions and undermining rehabilitation. Instead of fostering safer and more supportive environments, hyper-surveillance often leads to emotional withdrawal, resistance, or behavioural escalation (Miranda, 2024). Although some degree of surveillance is typically justified under prevailing correctional models as necessary for maintaining security, the extent of current investments often exceeds what is needed for basic safety.

Corporations like Paladin—and now Bosch—profit from expanding surveillance infrastructures, not reducing them. Their financial model depends on prison systems continuing to prioritize technological control over restorative or rehabilitative approaches. As millions of dollars flow into surveillance contracts, funding for mental health services, educational programs, and counseling remains comparatively under-resourced. Ultimately, the economic incentives of corporations involved in prison monitoring perpetuate a punitive system. As long as profit is tied to the expansion of surveillance technologies, prisons will remain sites of intensified control rather than spaces that promote healing, growth, or reintegration. While corporations benefit financially, the human cost is borne by persons who are incarcerated who experience increased psychological harm and diminished chances of successful rehabilitation (Miranda, 2024). Without a fundamental shift away from profit-driven surveillance and toward human-centered reform, the systemic emphasis on punishment over genuine transformation will persist.

The Canadian Corps of Commissionaires

The Canadian Corps of Commissionaires was awarded \$78.7 million to deliver protective services for CSC during this period. The Commissionaires is somewhat of an outlier in this report, as it is a not-for-profit organization, originally created to provide employment for returning veterans, and still hiring significant numbers of former service personnel. Our concerns with the funds being funneled to the Commissionaires, therefore, are not with regard to the profit margins of the company or the salary of the CEO. Our concern is with regard to the shortcomings of the Commissionaires.

While the roles of Commissionaires complement those of correctional officers, their responsibilities differ. Correctional officers oversee persons who are incarcerated, respond to emergencies, enforce rules, and support programming. Commissionaires focus on external security tasks, including perimeter security, entrance management, surveillance, escort responsibilities, and administrative support. This expenditure raises concerns about the balance between security-centric actions and funding for rehabilitation, as the Commissionaires lack the training to provide support to persons who are incarcerated, serving merely as an additional security presence.

According to the Commissionaires' website, training includes a 40 hour in-class Security Guard Training program, Emergency and Standard First Aid, and a range of specialized modules such as use of force, loss prevention, drug awareness, active shooter response, handcuffing techniques, and customer service-based courses (Commissionaires). However, there is no mention of Trauma Informed Care, Suicide Intervention, or Mental Health First Aid, all of which are critical for interacting responsibly with vulnerable or marginalized populations. Furthermore, no education beyond a high school diploma is required to apply. Given the absence of post secondary education requirements and the absence of training rooted in social work, addictions, psychology, or trauma informed practice, the preparation provided to Commissionaires is arguably inadequate for the complex environments in which they are often deployed, particularly in prisons and jails where they regularly interact with individuals experiencing trauma, mental illness, and systemic marginalization.

Moreover, Commissionaires do not face the same accountability as internally employed staff. This lack of oversight is reflected in multiple documented cases. For example, in January 2015, a Commissionaire in Northern Manitoba was charged with sexually assaulting a woman in custody (CBC News, 2015). In March 2022, another woman in custody in Manitoba reported being sexually assaulted and given alcohol by a Commissionaire (Pindera, 2022). Then in October 2023, a Commissionaire in Alberta was criminally charged for sexually assaulting a woman in custody (Yamoah, 2023). These incidents are only a few among many, yet they underscore serious concerns regarding inadequate oversight, inconsistent hiring standards, and the dangers of delegating core safety responsibilities to external quasi-military entities.

The Harms of Cost-Cutting: Food in Prisons

The above expenditures highlight a troubling imbalance: corporations reap substantial financial benefits while persons who are incarcerated struggle with inadequate support for rehabilitation and reintegration. Privatization introduces ethical concerns that compromise the correctional system's stated goal of rehabilitation. Private firms prioritize profit, leading to cost-cutting measures that negatively impact the quality of goods and services available to persons who are incarcerated. For instance, the implementation of the Food Services Modernization Initiative (FSMI) in 2014 exemplifies how cost-saving reforms within Canadian federal prisons often benefit institutions while producing harmful consequences for persons who are incarcerated. Promoted as a method to improve efficiency, FSMI centralized food preparation using a "cook chill" model (wherein pre-prepared meals

are simply reheated and served) and capped daily food spending at just \$5.41 per person, which was significantly lower than the costs for similarly prepared food provided in hospitals and care homes (Wilson et al., 2023).

Although CSC claimed over \$6.4 million in annual savings, it came at the expense of nutrition, autonomy, and dignity (Wilson et al., 2023). Meal quality declined, portion sizes were reduced, and dietary needs were frequently unmet (Wilson et al., 2023). A 2022 audit confirmed that FSMI meals frequently failed to meet Canada's Food Guide recommendations and that CSC staff lacked sufficient training in nutrition and menu planning (Hings et al., 2019). Additionally, FSMI eliminated rehabilitative kitchen programs such as the Culinary Arts Program, stripping away employment opportunities and certifications that were once available to persons who are incarcerated (Wilson et al., 2023).

The closure of CSC's prison farms in 2010 further exemplified how cost-cutting dismantled opportunities and increased food insecurity. These farms, previously operating at institutions such as Kingston, Frontenac and Rockwood, produced fresh milk, meat and produce for persons who were incarcerated while providing agricultural training and possible pathways to post-release employment. CSC justified the closures as cost-saving and inconsistent with its "correctional mandate," but the decision eliminated one of the few self-sustaining food systems within the federal prison network, increasing reliance on industrial food suppliers and undermining a model that connected nourishment with rehabilitation (Office of the Correctional Investigator, 2010). Although some farm operations were later reintroduced, CSC's 2021 update indicates the program now functions mainly as a Canadian Friends Service Committee

vocational training initiative rather than a full food-production system (Correctional Service Canada, 2021). Further, according to APTN, labour performed by persons who are incarcerated generated \$97.1 million in the 2024–2025 fiscal year, underscoring the economic value extracted from their work (Guyot, 2025). Recent investigations show that prison farms and incarcerated labour are under scrutiny for producing commodities—such as milk—for public sale, raising ethical concerns about the commercialization of prison labour and the prioritization of institutional profit over rehabilitation (Guyot, 2025). The *Prison Farms Exposed* report further argues that these changes reflect a shift from community-based rehabilitation and food sovereignty to a model driven primarily by cost-containment and market efficiency (Neufeld, 2024).

As food quality declined, many were forced to rely on over-priced commissary goods to supplement their basic dietary needs despite stagnant prison wages and deductions for room and board (Wilson et al., 2023; Zinger, 2023a). While the changes harmed persons who are incarcerated, they benefited CSC by simplifying logistics, reducing local discretion, and tightening institutional control. The federal government profited politically by aligning FSMI with deficit reduction efforts, and centralized food suppliers gained financially through large-scale, long-term procurement contracts. In this model, financial efficiency and bureaucratic convenience mask a system that shifts the cost of nourishment onto persons who are incarcerated while delivering savings and stability to institutional actors.

Commissary operations, also called canteens, are a critical part of this dynamic. While CSC provides a limited budget for institutional meals, these

canteens offer a space where persons who are incarcerated can purchase additional food and hygiene items, typically at a markup. “The canteen, once a destination for snack foods, now resembles a small grocery store stocking food like potatoes, chicken, and tuna” (Sinclair, 2025). It’s important to note that forcing people to rely on canteen purchases puts an expensive burden on the families of persons who are incarcerated, as it is often the families who are putting funds into someone’s account. These are families who may have already been financially marginalized prior to their loved one’s incarceration. With the incarceration they may have lost the financial support of that loved one, and are now, instead, providing them financial support. In this type of situation, there are often children who—through entirely no fault of their own—are now suffering from the reduction in the family income. It is no wonder that the incarceration of a parent is one of the ACEs (Adverse Childhood Events) that are correlated with a greater likelihood of difficulties in adulthood (US Centres for Disease Control, 2025). Additionally, the need to rely on over-priced canteen items can be a driver of illegal activities and “muscling” inside prisons.

According to Commissioner’s Directive 890, canteen profit margins are set at 10 percent, and purchase limits including for holiday canteen purchases are strictly controlled, often capped at \$90 per payment period (Correctional Service Canada, 2023). In practice, as reported in 2023, this limit was raised from \$90 to \$120 per 14 days in response to inflation, but the modest increase still reflects tight constraints on what persons who are incarcerated can afford to buy for themselves (Maxwell, 2023). These commissaries thus function as a limited safety valve, but only if persons who are incarcerated can afford them. With food budgets capped and wages Canadian Friends Service Committee

minimal, many are unable to access essential items like food or hygiene products from the canteen. The option exists only because privatized suppliers and CSC have structured the system that way.

Two major corporate recipients of CSC food expenditures are Sysco and Aramark, as confirmed by interviews conducted with persons who had previously been incarcerated (Anonymous, 2024). Sysco, in particular, has emerged as a dominant actor in federal prison food procurement, securing multiple standing offer agreements worth millions in potential call-ups. For instance, the company received a \$460,000 standing offer for commissary beverages in 2023 (Public Services and Procurement Canada, 2023a), a fresh produce contract valued at approximately \$1.19 million in 2024 (Public Services and Procurement Canada, 2024a), and a national groceries standing offer permitting ongoing call-ups cumulatively amounting to several million dollars (Public Services and Procurement Canada, 2023b). Many contracts are often listed with zero-dollar values because standing offers do not guarantee spending upfront; actual expenditures accrue later through call-ups that can substantially exceed the nominal posted amounts (Public Services and Procurement Canada, 2024b). Sysco's scale and profitability may place these contracts in a broader perspective. In the 2024 fiscal year, the company reported \$78.8 billion in delivered revenue (Sysco, 2024a), while its CEO earned nearly \$15.6 million in annual compensation, a sum comparable to the combined salaries of more than 250 average Canadian workers (Sysco, 2024b).

The consolidation of CSC food supply through corporations like Sysco, and the controlled, profit-generating nature of commissary operations, highlights yet another imbalance. While Sysco benefits from secure, large-scale, multi-region contracts, persons who are incarcerated contend with inadequate nutrition, limited options, and a commodified food system that treats them as consumers rather than people with rights to nourishment and dignity. Moreover, the interplay between FSMI-imposed constraints on meal budgets and the commodification of supplemental nourishment through commissary not only shifts food costs onto persons who are incarcerated and their families, but also embeds corporate profit into fundamental aspects of survival and comfort. The scarcity imposed by FSMI encourages reliance on canteen goods, yet the price markup and tight purchase limits ensure that only those with access to funds can benefit from these services.

The Building of Cages: Bird Construction⁷

Over the last several years, Bird Construction emerged as a prominent beneficiary of prison infrastructure expansion in Canada, securing multiple high-value government contracts tied to carceral growth. These included the \$154 million Nanaimo Correctional Centre replacement in British Columbia and rapid expansion projects at Ontario's Kenora Jail and Thunder Bay Correctional Centre (Bird Construction, 2021a; Cameron, 2023). The Ontario government's subsequent \$180 million commitment to modular expansions further entrenched Bird as a preferred contractor, reinforcing ongoing contractual relationships in a sector

⁷ This section pertains specifically to provincial prisons; this is one of the few areas where financial data pertaining to provincial corrections was available.

framed as urgent and essential (REMI Network, 2025). These contracts contributed to record-setting financial performance, including \$2.38 billion in revenue and a 10% shareholder dividend increase in 2022, signalling that prison building is not merely a public safety initiative but a profitable enterprise for Bird Construction and its partners (Bird Construction, 2023a). Partner firms like Stack Modular and associated architects, engineers, and subcontractors also profit, demonstrating that prison construction disperses financial gain across a commercial ecosystem built around incarceration (REMI Network, 2025).

Politically, governments—particularly Ontario’s Progressive Conservative administration—leverage prison construction to advance narratives of modernization, public safety, and economic development. Leaders such as Premier Doug Ford and Solicitor General Michael Kerzner publicly frame prison expansion as necessary for protecting correctional officers, stimulating regional economies, and reinforcing “tough on crime” policy optics (Cameron, 2023; Ontario Construction Report, 2022). In promotional materials on his official website, Kerzner (2025) underscores this stance by stating, “we’re investing half a billion dollars in the correctional sector to build more jails and create the necessary capacity to keep criminals behind bars,” a statement that explicitly ties fiscal expenditure to punitive capacity and electoral messaging. This narrative was reaffirmed when Infrastructure Ontario and the Ministry of the Solicitor General awarded Bird Construction the contract to design and build expansions at the Niagara Detention Centre in Thorold, the Vanier Centre for Women in Milton, and the repurposed Cecil Facer Youth Centre in Sudbury (Infrastructure Ontario, 2025). Furthermore, Bird Construction was

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selected as the preferred proponent through Infrastructure Ontario’s *Request for Qualifications and Standing Offer* process. Following negotiations, Infrastructure Ontario awarded Bird Construction the contract to deliver these projects on behalf of the Ministry of the Solicitor General, a move intended to streamline procurement and expedite delivery timelines (Infrastructure Ontario, 2025).

At a systemic level, Bird’s role exemplifies how public policy and private profit converge in a Canadian variant of the prison-industrial complex. While Canada indeed lacks private prisons, the construction, financing, and expansion of state-run facilities operate within a profit-generating framework that rewards corporate expertise in “rapid delivery” models favoured by agencies like Infrastructure Ontario (Infrastructure Ontario, 2021). Bird Construction has explicitly positioned prison infrastructure within its “Public Safety” strategic growth area and markets these projects as creating “long-term value” for both communities and shareholders (Bird Construction, 2023b). This framing reconfigures incarceration as a site of economic opportunity, forming a feedback loop in which state commitments to carceral expansion ensure sustained corporate revenue. At the same time, corporations build reputational capital that helps secure future contracts. In this ecosystem, the government secures policy legitimacy and economic stimulus, unions attain “safer” workplaces and expanded staffing, and Bird Construction and its corporate allies translate public fear, political will, and institutional consensus into financial gain. The question of *who benefits* thus finds a clear answer: carceral infrastructure expansion is not a neutral state investment but a political-economic project in which corporate actors like Bird Construction are central beneficiaries.

Communication as Commodity: Phones, Tablets, & the Cost of Staying Connected⁸

Maintaining contact with loved ones is a crucial aspect of mental well-being and can be critical for successful rehabilitation and reintegration. Yet, in Canada's correctional institutions, both federal and provincial, communication is treated as a commodity. While CSC states that maintaining family and community ties is essential to reintegration, its contractual relationships with private telecom providers tell a different story. From traditional phone calls to tablet-based messaging and media, persons who are incarcerated and their families face steep fees, limited access, and constant surveillance, all framed as modern conveniences. In Manitoba a 15 minute call costs \$3 (tax not included) and a collect call \$4.50 (McLeod and Abas, 2025). These charges may seem modest, but since prison wages have been frozen since the 1980s, they create a substantial barrier to maintaining regular contact with family. Moreover, while one can purchase pre-paid "bundles" of 15 calls for \$19.05, the bundles come with expiry dates, and additional hidden fees; meaning that it can cost someone \$185 monthly if they were to make three calls a day. Privatization has exacerbated these issues. An example of the kind of profit that can be made off of this arrangement can be found in Ontario. Between 2013 and 2021, Bell Canada held the phone contract for Ontario's provincial jails, reportedly generating \$64 million in revenue. During this period, the Ontario government received a 60% commission on those earnings (Jones, 2024). This underscores the financial incentives for both the service provider and the state. The individuals

⁸ This is one area where it was possible to find data on provincial institutions, but unfortunately not on federal ones.

financing these communications, typically families and loved ones, are often low-income, racialized, and already disproportionately affected by incarceration. They are effectively paying to sustain a basic human connection.

A similar profit model now governs digital communication through the Synergy tablet program. Synergy Technology Systems, headquartered in Texas and acquired by Telio Group in Germany in 2023, operates telecom services and deposit kiosks in correctional facilities across Canada. According to German economics website *Die Deutsche Wirtschaft* (2024), Telio Group made 111 million Euros in sales in 2024 (or approx. 127 million in US dollars). In 2024, Synergy introduced tablets in the Winnipeg Remand Centre, touted as tools for education and rehabilitation. In practice, however, the tablets are divided into two modes. The free mode contains some religious content, a few brochures from community-based organizations, and a basic calculator, but little else. There is no access to news, entertainment, education, or other material unless users pay. The paid mode charges 15 cents per minute for access to movies, television through Pluto TV, and simple games. A single movie can cost 18 dollars, and browsing the selection is also billed. The impact of this is that if someone struggles with reading, or if they are visually or cognitively impaired, they will be charged more to use the system (McLeod and Abas, 2025). Some persons who are incarcerated report spending hundreds of dollars per week on tablet use—money that their loved ones have to put into their account (Samson Fellows, 2025). Others cannot afford access at all. Deposits for tablets, phones, and canteen must be made by family or friends through Synergy's kiosk or website,

where each transaction is subject to a 14% surcharge. This means that a \$100 deposit ends up costing families \$114.

It is unclear whether this surcharge goes to Synergy or to the Province of Manitoba, or if it is shared between them. Regardless, the burden falls on families. Messaging is similarly monetized. Persons who are incarcerated pay by the minute to send and receive texts, all of which are reviewed by correctional officers. Responses from loved ones cost 80 cents per message. Uploading a photo or even a short message can cost several dollars due to slow system speeds and per-minute billing. These features, rather than supporting connection and mental health, function as yet another form of extraction. As with many correctional contracts, there is no publicly available information on how the Synergy agreement was negotiated, its duration, or whether any oversight exists. In the absence of transparency, accountability is nearly impossible to achieve.

Synergy's communication contracts are problematic for additional reasons. As McLeod and Abas (2025) point out, Synergy controls 80% of the market share of provincial and territorial correctional centres. Moreover, there has not been a competitive bidding process. This has given Synergy a virtual monopoly, with a "captive audience" experiencing high needs. As with all monopolies, we can expect that prices will go up and services will deteriorate. Indeed, prices have already gone up—tablet use in Manitoba provincial jails went from 10 cents a minute in 2019 to 13 cents a minute in 2025. Additionally, Synergy uses technology provided by ViaPath Technologies, a company that, like McKesson Canada Corporation (and its U.S. counterpart), has been embroiled in lawsuits. In the U.S., ViaPath faced a lawsuit over Canadian Friends Service Committee

“its practice of taking customers’ deposits from their account” and in 2020 “it uploaded unencrypted personal data of roughly 650,000 customers—including Social Security numbers, medical requests, and messages—online, some of which filtered onto the dark web” (McLeod and Abas, 2025).

The United States is ahead of Canada in the case of regulation of telecommunication technology in carceral institutions (and also, in some states, provides free phone service to persons who are incarcerated). In Canada, however, while some phone rates in federal institutions are regulated by the CRTC, Synergy’s systems are exempt. As a U.S.-based corporation, it is not considered a “Canadian carrier” under the *Telecommunications Act* and therefore does not need CRTC approval for its pricing. Ironically, under current contractual agreements, some of the profits that Synergy is making are returned to provinces (it is unclear how much). In Manitoba, some of this money has been earmarked for “Indigenous Programming.” As McLeod and Abas (2025) note, “In other words, families of inmates are subsidizing services that are the responsibility of the province. More specifically, it means that Indigenous families may be paying for Indigenous cultural programming.”

This means that communication in correctional facilities is no longer a right. It is a revenue stream. These systems generate significant profits for multinational corporations while extracting money from those least able to afford it. They create a digital divide behind bars, where access to information and human connection is determined by purchasing power. And they reveal a contradiction between the stated values of rehabilitation and the economic realities of incarceration. Issues such as

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excessive pharmaceutical use, heightened surveillance, poor food quality, and restricted and over-priced communication illustrate how privatization can increase systemic problems. By outsourcing these services, CSC (and their provincial-territorial counterparts) risks reducing persons who are incarcerated to mere commodities within a profit-centred framework, with their needs coming second to the interests of the government and corporations. This situation significantly threatens the quality of essential services—particularly mental healthcare—that persons who are incarcerated require (Health Canada, 2020; Zinger, 2023a).

The Paradox of Prison Labour: Rehabilitation, Coercion, and Exploitation

Since the beginning of colonial Canada, prisons have relied on the labour of the people they incarcerate. What began as a form of punishment has evolved into a complex system that is justified in the name of rehabilitation, but often functions as a mechanism of coercion and cost-saving.

Historical Foundations

In the early colonial period, labour in prisons was explicitly punitive. Persons who were incarcerated were often forced to dig holes and refill them simply to pass the time (Kleuskens, 2015). With the rise of industrial capitalism, particularly during World War II, the Canadian government began to view prison labour as a potential resource. Persons who were incarcerated were compelled to produce goods for the war effort, transforming their labour into state profit (Kleuskens, 2015).

Following the war, a shift occurred within the judicial system toward a rehabilitation-oriented philosophy. In line with a Protestant religious “work ethic” that saw work as a moral responsibility (not to mention the necessity of having wage labourers in a capitalist society), work came to be seen as intrinsically rehabilitative, a “necessity” for reintegration into society. By the 1960s, a movement emerged to train persons who were incarcerated in trades such as plumbing and carpentry (Kleuskens, 2015). This set the stage for a new vision of prison labour that would eventually be formalized.

The Ouimet Report and the Birth of CORCAN

The Special Committee on Corrections (Ouimet Committee) released a landmark report in 1969, recommending that Canada’s correctional system emphasize vocational and skills training over mere industrial production (McElligott, 2017). However, early reports suggested that vocational training provided little incentive for persons who were incarcerated to engage in work. In 1973, the federal government proposed a prison industry program to provide supervised on-the-job training.

By 1992, this program had evolved into CORCAN, a Special Operating Agency with a business-like structure. CORCAN’s stated goal was to provide persons who were incarcerated with employability skills and to support reintegration after release. Yet, as researchers and persons who were incarcerated have observed, this shift often masked a continued emphasis on coerced, low-wage labour disguised as rehabilitation (House, 2020; McElligott, 2017).

Types of Labour

Today, persons who are incarcerated typically work in four sectors: manufacturing, construction, textiles, and services. Government agencies are some of the largest beneficiaries. For example, furniture produced through CORCAN is widely used in Service Canada offices, and license plates have been made in Ontario through prison labour for decades (Fitzgerald et al., 2021; McElligott, 2017).

This arrangement is cost-effective for the state, allowing the government to avoid paying market wages and benefits (Zinger, 2023a). CORCAN itself frames this as rehabilitative: “providing training and employability skills to offenders” to reduce recidivism (CORCAN Annual Report, 2009). However, scholars such as Jordan House (2022) argue that the program prioritizes cost-saving over genuine rehabilitation. House (2022) calls for persons who are incarcerated to be unionized, paid fair wages, and given meaningful rights.

Choice or Coercion?

Although the government of Canada claims participation in CORCAN is voluntary, evidence paints a different picture. Engagement in the program is tied to an individual’s Correctional Plan and evaluated during conditional release processes (Kleuskens, 2015; McElligott, 2017). Successful participation can lead to fewer restrictive conditions, meaning refusal to work—even on legitimate safety grounds—can harm release prospects (McElligott, 2017; Zinger, 2023a). CORCAN is presented as an opportunity for personal development, yet non-participation carries punitive consequences. In effect, labour becomes a requirement rather than a choice, blurring the line between rehabilitation and coercion.

No discussion of prison labour is complete without acknowledging one of the key injustices surrounding carceral labour. One of the shocking statistics regarding incarceration in Canada is that the majority of persons currently incarcerated have not been found guilty of a crime. According to figures from the John Howard Society (2024), for instance, over 70% of people in provincial jails are “there despite not having been found guilty of any crime.” They are on remand awaiting trial or have breached a parole condition. Technically, therefore, the majority of persons who are incarcerated in Canada should actually be considered innocent, given that they are to be “innocent until proven guilty.” Despite that innocence, a central reality of carceral institutions is that these institutions can only function due to the existence of prison labour. Persons who are incarcerated work in the kitchens, the laundry, housekeeping, and other essential roles. They keep the prisons running. Requiring people to perform prison labour means that, in reality, persons who are incarcerated, including those who are presumed to be innocent, are forced to be complicit in their own incarceration.

Exploitation of Labour

Persons who were formerly incarcerated have testified to unsafe work conditions and inadequate protective equipment. Wages in federal prisons are strikingly low, capped at \$6.90 per day—a figure frozen since 1981 (Zinger, 2023a). This stagnation is particularly harsh given the rising cost of necessities in prison canteens. On top of this, mandatory deductions remove nearly half of their already meagre earnings: 22 percent for food and accommodation, 8 percent for telephone system administration, 10 percent for court-ordered obligations, another 10 percent

for mandatory savings, and around 2 percent for the “Inmate Welfare Fund” (Zinger, 2023a). As a result, someone earning the common daily rate of \$5.80 will only make \$27.84 for a two-week pay period, or roughly \$2.78 per workday, equivalent to 46 cents an hour. This financial structure forces persons who are incarcerated to subsidize their own incarceration, leaving them with very little ability to purchase basic goods, communicate with loved ones, or save for reintegration. This also sends a problematic message about work: that it is a form of punishment, that it is mind-numbing, dangerous, and poorly remunerated. As Sena Hussain observes, “It reinforces the message some went in with, which is that to make it out of poverty, they need to keep doing the kinds of illegal activities they did to make money before they were arrested” (Hussain, as cited in Sinclair, 2025).

An Outdated Program

Many critics argue that CORCAN’s training programs fail to meet the demand of the modern labour market (Burke, 2017; Zinger, 2023a). Zinger (2020) emphasizes that while CORCAN produces revenue, it does not prepare participants for meaningful post-release employment. Catherine Latimer of the John Howard Society stresses that rehabilitation should take precedence over profit (Burke, 2017).

John Samson Fellows, Literacy Instructor at the John Howard Society of Manitoba, questions the usefulness of the training and experience gained by incarcerated CORCAN workers:

In my experience helping persons who were formerly incarcerated with their resumes, cover letters, and job interview preparations, we generally don’t focus on their work at CORCAN. If their time in prison comes up in interviews,

employers want to see how they have changed and grown while incarcerated. For example, we will highlight any programs they were able to complete while there, their volunteer work, helping Elders with ceremonies, or their increased understanding of who they are now. That's much more effective than talking about the mostly unchallenging labour they did with CORCAN for 40 or 50 cents an hour while they were in prison (Samson Fellows, 2025).

Surely it is the epitome of “useless labour” if putting it on a resume detracts, rather than adds, to the usefulness of that resume.

Profit Over Rehabilitation: The Paradox Laid Bare

The closure of several CORCAN shops saved CSC \$5 million, which challenges the notion of CORCAN as a profitable venture for the state. However, this also highlights a deeper issue: many CORCAN programs fail to provide relevant, marketable skills and may function more to keep individuals occupied than to prepare them for reintegration after prison. This is the central paradox. CORCAN is promoted as rehabilitative and voluntary, yet its structure emphasizes compliance, low-cost production, and institutional control. It offers little evidence of reducing recidivism or meaningfully improving employment outcomes. Without reform, CORCAN risks functioning as a mechanism of social control rather than a bridge to rehabilitation and reintegration.

Alternatives to Incarceration: Community Programming

A Case for Alternatives: Support vs. Punishment

When advocating for systemic reform, it is essential to provide evidence-based alternatives. Thankfully, there is a rich history of successful alternatives to lengthy prison sentences, both in Canada and throughout the world. As mentioned earlier, Waller (2019) provides strong evidence for the effectiveness of preventative programming: recreation, arts, youth programs, and addiction and mental health services. Drug and mental health courts provide space to look more deeply into the roots of a person's behaviour. Community sentences have drawbacks (such as the restrictions that are placed on people, which can lead to virtually-inevitable infractions), but at their best may offer another alternative. A Guaranteed Liveable Basic Income would reduce poverty-related crimes. Better support upon release would help reduce recidivism. Restorative Justice programs abound, and we will expand on these below; currently however, they are largely used only for "smaller" infractions. Law professor Leo Baskatawang (2025) and others call for restorative approaches to be used throughout the judicial system. Manitoba's ground-breaking Aboriginal Justice Inquiry (AJI) was released in 1991. Among the recommendations of the AJI was a call for the creation of an "Aboriginal Justice System" that would respond to harm and wrongdoing through culturally appropriate, transformative methods. Article 5 of the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*- which the Supreme Court has ruled is part of Canada's positive law (Supreme Court), affirms that Indigenous Peoples have the "right to maintain and strengthen their distinct political, legal, economic, social, and cultural institutions."

Over the past three decades Indigenous-led justice-making ventures have been spreading across the country⁹ and indeed around the world. These courts may still be embedded in the colonial judicial system, but, as a Blackfoot Elder said, while addressing the “Restorative Court” on the Siksika Nation in Alberta, they are “putting the Indian back into justice” (Anonymous, 2025). Healing Lodges are proving to be significantly more successful than standard incarceration at helping people heal and create new and healthy life pathways. In fact, they are so successful that an argument can easily be made that there should be Healing Lodges available to anyone who might find their approach helpful, including non-Indigenous people (only if there was sufficient space for Indigenous people first), and people with no justice-system involvement. In short, there are *many* alternatives; what we lack is the commitment, the vision, and the imagination to put them into place. To do so will require weaning our society off of conflating “justice” with “punishment.” It will require providing more and better support to persons who have been harmed, and it will require breaking away from our current system, which harms many and primarily benefits corporations.

In the grey boxes on the following page we see two of the many successful stories that could be told. In each case, it was not imprisonment that transformed someone’s life, but rather the support provided by community organizations that genuinely aimed to assist individuals. Prolonged incarceration hindered their participation in these healing programs.

⁹ The following link provides a listing of some of these Indigenous courts in Canada (sometimes called Gladue Courts): <https://www.cba.org/our-impact/initiatives/truth-and-reconciliation/gladue->

The John Howard Society of Calgary shares the story of a man who, after a difficult childhood, turned to substance abuse. This led him to commit a violent act, resulting in incarceration before he moved to a halfway house in Calgary.

With the help of counselling and support, he maintained his sobriety. After eight months, he rejoined the community, equipped with skills he had learned at the halfway house, such as cooking, cleaning, and home maintenance. These skills helped him maintain his apartment and find stable employment. With ongoing support, he emerged as a success story.

As of 2022, he lives with his girlfriend in an apartment, has a steady job, and has been sober for over a year

(David: Being Part of the Solution, 2022).

The Elizabeth Fry Society assisted a young woman from Manitoba who faced legal issues and spent time in prison before moving to a Healing Lodge in Saskatchewan. This journey opened her eyes to restorative justice, motivating her to advocate for positive change for herself and others. With the support of the Elizabeth Fry Society-dedicated to helping women reintegrate into society following incarceration-she secured a job through their social enterprise program, which employs women to turn donated waste wool into handcrafted items for sale. Later, they hired her to share her lived experience during the launch of the Pathways not Prisons campaign, and she was excited about the projects she is collaborating on with them. In a 2022 interview with Global Heroes, she reflected on her incarceration experience and her connection to the Elizabeth Fry Society (Elizabeth Fry Society Empowers Women Leaving Prison, 2022):

There's this perception that anyone who's been in prison is bad, and that simply isn't true. Sometimes people just make mistakes and in a lot of cases, challenges with mental health are what led to the issues. I've experienced both being punished and being supported and let me tell you, helping someone heal is much better at stopping recidivism (para. 6).

Myrna McCallum, a Métis-Cree lawyer, makes a powerful comment on the inefficiency of the prison system, stating, “as long as you’re just sentencing people, sending them to jail, upholding sentencing principles of denunciation and deterrence, you’re really just putting a bandaid on a bullet wound” (McCallum, as cited in Perrin, 2023, p.11). Considering this statement, why does CSC allocate substantial funds from taxpayers to isolate individuals from society, limiting their access to adequate rehabilitation programs like those mentioned above, and delaying their reintegration into the community? In light of this information, we must ponder the true purpose of prisons.

Persons Who Have Been Harmed¹⁰ and the Option of Restorative Justice

Although not the focus of this report, it is important not to overlook the needs and voices of persons who have been harmed by crime. We acknowledge the harm, trauma, and loss experienced by persons who have been harmed, and we do not seek to minimize their suffering. We want to note that our current justice system does not adequately serve persons who have been harmed, nor does it hold perpetrators accountable in a meaningful way. Many persons who have been harmed are seeking opportunities for healing and moving on, but the punitive nature of the system often serves to hinder actual reparative efforts. This approach further entrenches a cycle of violence, often leaving both the persons who have been harmed and communities in a worse state. Research consistently demonstrates that incarceration fails to enhance safety, instead increasing the chances of recidivism and mental health challenges (Health Canada, 2020; Perrin, 2023; Petrich et al., 2021; Schuster, 2024). In 2019, researchers shared their findings on incarceration and public safety, revealing that imprisonment has little impact on reducing violent crime rates (Harding et al., 2019). They concluded that alternative policies and interventions aimed at violence prevention might yield more significant benefits at lower social and economic costs (Harding et al., 2019). Considering this, it would be more effective for the government to allocate funds toward alternatives rather than relying on incarceration. Indeed, Waller (2019) has shown that if governments reduced their current expenditures on the criminal justice system by

¹⁰ This report uses the term “*persons who have been harmed*” instead of “*victim*” to prioritize person-first, trauma-informed language that acknowledges individuals beyond the harm they experienced. However, the term “*victim*” may still be used when referring directly to legal contexts or statutes where it remains the standard term, such as in the Victims’ Bill of Rights.

as little as 10%, and invested those funds into preventative programs, violent crime would be reduced by 50%. Such an approach would create enormous savings in terms of reducing grief and human suffering. It would also create significant financial savings. A common response from persons who have been harmed is a desire to make sure that what happened to them—or to their loved one—does not happen again to someone else. Surely, therefore, they deserve to have responses to harm and wrongdoing that are most likely to end recidivism and increase community safety.

A Restorative Justice Approach

A study published by the Department of Justice Canada (2018) shows that Canadians strongly support restorative justice practices. Specifically, 87% of respondents believe that persons who have been harmed should be able to meet their perpetrators to share the impact of the crime. Nevertheless, restorative justice policies have also drawn criticism for placing excessive emphasis on perpetrators at the expense of persons who have been harmed (Schuster, 2024). While it is not a flawless solution, and the participation of persons who have been harmed should always be voluntary, research has produced significant positive findings. For instance, a study in the UK revealed that approximately 85% of persons who had been harmed who engaged in restorative justice programs were satisfied, as it permitted them to express their experiences and find closure (Grimsey Jones et al., 2023). They also reported experiencing lower anxiety and a heightened sense of safety after the restorative process (Grimsey Jones et al., 2023). In Sweden, research demonstrated that restorative practices significantly reduced recidivism rates

compared to conventional punitive approaches (Nordén & Forsman, 2019). Although restorative justice practices require further evaluation in public settings, the existing judicial infrastructure fails to enhance individual safety in its current approach, suggesting that a change in narrative may be beneficial.

Jo-Anne Wemmers (2021), a professor at the University of Montreal, conducted a study exploring restorative options for persons who have been harmed by sexual violence (a category of offence for which restorative justice is seldom considered). Her findings suggest that allowing persons who have been harmed by sexual violence to engage in restorative justice practices (if they so choose) is beneficial. Unfortunately, awareness of restorative justice as an option remains low among persons who have been harmed by sexual violence in Canada (Wemmers, 2021). Current court and trial processes offer minimal opportunities for healing among persons who have been harmed, often resulting in their voices going unheard. Restorative justice, on the other hand, enables persons who have been harmed to articulate the personal ramifications of the crime through a more therapeutic lens. Notifying persons who have been harmed of these choices would enable them to influence the management of their case and determine their level of involvement (Wemmers, 2021). This notification should be embedded into the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights. Currently the Bill does state that “Victims may request information about... available victim services and programs, including restorative justice programs” (2015, para. 4). Unfortunately, nowhere in the Bill does it require anyone to tell victims about the existence of restorative justice programs. This means that if victims know about such programs, they can ask for information, but if they don’t

know about them (as is true for the majority of Canadians), they would not know what to ask for, and it is not required that they be given information.

The Success of Community Involvement

Over the past two decades, New Zealand has emerged as a key player in restorative justice by incorporating specific measures into its legislation for Rangatahi Courts. These courts convene persons who have been harmed, perpetrators, and Māori Elders to collectively address harm in ways that resonate with their culture (Taumaunu, 2012). In the UK, restorative justice panels have been shown to effectively resolve offences by ensuring that persons who have been harmed have an active voice while helping perpetrators understand the impact of their actions (Strang et al., 2013). Participants in the Thames Valley region have expressed higher satisfaction with these panels than traditional court processes (Strang et al., 2013). Meanwhile, in South Africa, ubuntu-inspired forums, guided by community leaders, foster dialogues between persons who have been harmed and perpetrators (Gade, 2012). This method reinforces communal ties by emphasizing that healing involves the entire community. In Canada, traditional Indigenous justice emphasizes community healing and involves those who have been harmed by crime in holding perpetrators accountable (Zinger, 2023b). Healing circles, for example, create an opportunity for persons who have been harmed to engage with perpetrators in the presence of community members. The community approaches healing as a collective responsibility, asserting that harm is a systemic issue that its members should address meaningfully (Perrin, 2023).

Within Canada, innovative Indigenous-led justice models are emerging as powerful alternatives to the traditional prison system. For instance, the Tsuut'ina Nation's Office of the Peacemaker in Alberta offers a court structure built on Indigenous legal traditions. Here, community members, Elders, persons who have been harmed by crime, and perpetrators gather in a circular format to resolve harm through dialogue, healing, and restoration rather than punishment. This approach affirms Indigenous collective responsibility and accountability values while avoiding punitive incarceration (Department of Justice Canada, 2018). Models like the Tsuut'ina Peacemaker Court highlight how culturally grounded restorative practices foster rehabilitation and community safety more effectively than prisons do.

The Canadian government, and—more importantly—Canadian society as a whole, will inevitably benefit from allocating funds towards constructive initiatives, such as Indigenous healing circles and restorative justice panels, rather than merely relying on punitive measures. Restorative justice, an approach with a long history in Canada, allows for a shift away from punitive systems that primarily benefit private companies profiting from high incarceration rates and expensive operations. By establishing a restorative justice framework, those most affected by crime—including those seeking closure, perpetrators, and communities working towards safety and unity—would reap substantial benefits. Crucial to this transformation is a reorientation from institutional control and corporate profit towards justice, healing, and community transformation.

Further Exploration: Beyond the Report

The challenges within the Canadian prison system are extensive and interrelated. This report provides a comprehensive analysis of some of the systemic inequities, privatization, and the consequences of incarceration policies. However, additional research could deepen our understanding and uncover effective solutions. Below are some recommended areas for further investigation that this report could not cover:

- **Political Lobbying:** Examining how corporations influence government contracts and shape policy changes is an intriguing area for future exploration. Financial and political donations, as well as the influence of public-private partnerships, could shed light on the financial and political dynamics that drive privatization in corrections policy.
- **Corporate Accountability in Contract Transparency:** A crucial area for further investigation is the lack of transparency in contracts between CSC and private corporations. Numerous companies in the prison system operate under anonymous or numbered names (as noted in the “Challenges” section of this report), complicating efforts to trace their financial activities and contractual terms. This opacity raises concerns regarding the allocation of taxpayer dollars and whether these corporations are genuinely held accountable for their services. For instance, contracts that feature vague descriptions of the services or goods provided—like “Institutional Buildings” or “Consulting”—offer little insight into the actual nature of the work. Such a system enables companies to conceal their profits and operations, potentially resulting in inferior services that prioritize

cost savings over quality. By examining these unclear practices, researchers could highlight the necessity for increased accountability, ensuring that private corporations do not profit from taxpayer-funded contracts without meeting defined, measurable standards of service transparency.

- **Provincial Government Contracts:** Given that the majority of persons who are incarcerated in Canada are held in provincial remand facilities and jails, it is crucial that provincial governments make their contract data available to the public for scrutiny. A further important area for research and analysis would be to explore provincial expenditures, and to further unearth the corporations that financially benefit from provincial governments.
- **Public-private Partnerships:** While beyond the scope of this report, an important area for further research could be the role of public-private partnerships (P3s), particularly in the creation of carceral infrastructure in Canada. Vining et. al. have pointed out that “evidence from six project case studies and an analysis of U.S. prison P3s suggests that the private sector often attempts to gain as much as it can at the expense of the public sector” and that there has been an “imperative to prevent projects from terminating” (2004). Buttenhuis’ thesis “Public-private partnerships and prison expansion in Ontario: Shifts in Governance 1995-2012” (2013) might be a helpful resource in this exploration.
- **CRTC Regulation:** In September 2025, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) sent the federal and provincial governments, along with companies including Synergy, a “request for information regarding telecommunications systems and services in correctional

facilities.” We hope this leads to regulation of this secretive market, and a larger public discussion about those who profit from the incarceration of people.

These suggestions serve as a starting point. Additional research beyond this report could foster a broader conversation on the topic, potentially aiding in transforming public perceptions and responses to justice and incarceration.

Conclusion: Shifting the Focus

The central focus of this report—Cui Bono—uncovers troubling truths about the Canadian prison system. Analyzing its history, the privatization of services and the exploitation of incarcerated labour shows that prisons do not serve the interests of persons who are incarcerated, nor do they serve the interests of the broader society since they do not support safety or rehabilitation; instead, those they benefit are private corporations. If prisons aim to rehabilitate individuals who have committed harmful acts, why do we continuously fail to reach this objective? Historical precedence has favoured financial gains, institutional dominance, and political agendas over genuine rehabilitation, justice, and community safety. The prison industry further harms marginalized populations, perpetuating cycles of incarceration. As Senator Kim Pate (2024) passionately reminds us, Canadian prisons operate as storage facilities for people who are grappling with severe issues like mental health struggles, addiction, and systemic poverty—people who have been failed by our social systems. Instead of healing and rehabilitating people, carceral institutions all too often serve to increase the severity of these issues. While corporations and their CEOs profit from lucrative contracts and CSC benefits from Canadian Friends Service Committee

the low-cost labour of persons who are incarcerated, communities do not become any safer. Thus, are prisons genuinely rehabilitative or merely businesses that exert state and corporate control in ways that increase insecurity in communities? Surely political and corporate boundaries should not be able to limit true and impactful justice and healing. As Nils Christie warned nearly half a century ago, the danger lies not only in the growth of prisons themselves but in the normalization of an industry of control that converts social problems into opportunities for profit. Recognizing and interrupting these economic logics is essential to building systems rooted in care rather than captivity.

Inspired by successes from other nations and from within Canada itself, alternative approaches abound. Allocating resources to solutions emphasizing human dignity, community safety, and accountability could tackle societal harm more effectively. Success stories from the John Howard Society and the Elizabeth Fry Society illustrate that community-based programs can offer effective rehabilitation and reduce recidivism. Transforming the prison system demands time and courage, yet shifting our focus presents a new avenue for progress. The current model is ill-equipped to rehabilitate or resolve the deep-rooted issues that lead to harmful behaviours.¹¹ Surely Canadians should consider a change if a system has failed for over a century.

¹¹As of November 12, 2025: Ivan Zinger, Canada's Correctional Investigator, announced he will leave his post two years early, citing persistent inaction by the federal government on critical issues including Indigenous over-representation, inadequate mental-health supports, and systemic discrimination in the federal prison system (Needham, 2025).

Clearly it is not those who are incarcerated, nor those who have been harmed who benefit from increasing the profits of transnational corporations. Nor is it society as a whole. And if neither persons who are incarcerated nor communities are gaining from incarceration, there is no rationale for upholding the status quo, and certainly no value to the Canadian taxpayers who are unknowingly and unintentionally continuing to enrich corporations, to no greater avail.

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Appendix

Screenshots of Data on CSC contracts

As noted in the body of this report (pages 9-10), one of the key challenges we faced in researching and writing this document was the instability of the data hosted on the Open Government portal (<https://search.open.canada.ca/contracts/1>). The dataset from which we originally drew our figures—accessed in November 2024—is shown in the screenshot below. This dataset provided the basis for the contract totals cited throughout this report. The sum displayed in the bottom left-hand corner represents the total value of CSC contracts for the reporting period (January 2022 – November 2024), exceeding \$3.6 billion.

[illegible]

Since that initial access, we have returned to the portal on more than seven separate occasions, only to find the figures continually shifting. Screenshots taken on November 9 and November 11, 2025, are included below for reference. Notably, the total posted on November 11 was approximately \$2 billion, while the November 9 dataset showed \$2.5 billion. Other data points—such as the number of contracts issued and the totals associated with specific corporations—also fluctuated.

The variations in screenshots reflect the diverse efforts of multiple researchers, working from different computers, to understand these discrepancies and attempt

Finally, we remind readers that, despite repeated attempts, we have not received an explanation from Canadian government officials regarding the cause of these data fluctuations. When contacted, officials were unable to provide either a satisfactory explanation or appropriate contact information for someone who could address our concerns.

[illegible]

Canadian Friends Service Committee

Acknowledgements

Canadian Friends Service Committee, Lindsay Hunt and Karen Ridd would like to thank the following for their assistance with this work: Lisa Dawn Bowden, Canadian Mennonite University, Elizabeth Comack, John Samson Fellows, Global College of the University of Winnipeg, Shea Hunt, Matt Legge, Manitoba Association of Rights and Liberties (MARL), Justin Piché, Jenn Preston, Neill Telles-Langdon, and Kevin Walby.



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