

**Vote NO on Corizon**

**By:**

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We are the elected president of the Fraternal Order of Police unit that represents DC Correctional Officers and the director of the DC Prisoners Project of the Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs, which represents incarcerated people and sometimes sues the Department of Corrections and individual officers on behalf of inmates. We are hardly usual allies, but we find ourselves in complete agreement over an issue that is vital for all DC residents: healthcare in our jails.

The DC Department of Corrections is proposing to contract with Corizon Health, Inc., a private corrections healthcare company that operates in some jails and prisons around the country, to provide health care at the local jail facilities. When the D.C. Council votes on the contract, we urge the Councilmembers to vote "no." With problems documented in lawsuits and in court and police investigations in Alabama, Arizona, Florida, Idaho, Kentucky, Maine, Michigan, Mississippi, New York, Pennsylvania and Virginia, the District cannot sign up for a fiscal and human rights nightmare.

The nightmare stories about Corizon are plentiful. A 20 year old, who was diagnosed with cardiovascular problems and bipolar disorder, being shackled to a table by his arms and legs and left naked in a 106-degree cell for four days, resulting in his death. A woman forced to wait eight months to receive treatment after being diagnosed with colorectal cancer; when she finally visited a doctor, she was febrile, septic, and in great pain due to a cancer-related infection. A man left paralyzed from the waist down after Corizon doctors failed to administer antibiotics for a severe fungal infection. A Corizon nurse withholding food, water, and dialysis from people she didn't like. These are just a few of the horror stories happening on the watch of Corizon.

Our concerns are not just about safeguarding the human rights of the District's incarcerated residents. Good healthcare at the jails protects the lives of the correctional officers we employ.

The Officers and Support Staff, who ensure security and provide services inside the jail, want the best medical care for everyone because we recognize that we are all there together. Retreating back to the many lawsuits and malpractices of the distant past hurts everyone. Prior to 2006, medical care at the Jail was suspect. There were many lawsuits. Healthcare was questionable at best and not accredited. The city taxpayer was constantly on the hook for potential millions. Since 2006 medical care improved noticeably, is accredited, and lawsuits have been greatly reduced. This win-win saves lives and money. Why vote to go “back to the future” when so much proof and real-time evidence of shoddy service exists. Why put the community at risk?

Instead of bringing in Corizon, the city should take the necessary steps to secure a provider with a record of responsible, high quality care for individuals who are incarcerated.

Quality jail healthcare protects our whole city. Providing quality healthcare for our incarcerated residents is an opportunity to meet the health and mental health needs of one of the city’s most marginalized populations. With the right provider, the jail can be a place where the city addresses public health crises such as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and diabetes. The vast majority of people who are in the jails come back to live and work in DC. It’s critical that we facilitate continuity of care for this population by creating links to services when they are discharged. The public health of the entire city depends upon it. Inmates, Staff, and by extension Washington’s neighborhoods, are safer as healthcare providers have reduced the risk of medical outbreaks in our facilities. Like the incarcerated population, officers have families and are your neighbors. This healthcare issue we all agree on: public health is public safety.

By rejecting the healthcare contract with Corizon, the Council can demonstrate that the District values all lives and will protect the human rights of everyone in our city. There are certainly improvements that should be made to health and mental health services at the jail. However, contracting with a for-profit company with a horrific track record of questionable health care practices is a step in the wrong direction.

Instead of continuing to pursue approval of this contract, the city should revise the flawed RFP process that would have resulted in a contract award to a company with Corizon’s abysmal track record. Benignly neglecting health by providing questionable healthcare contractors while ignoring all the available evidence of questionable service, places all stakeholders -- incarcerated citizens, hardworking Staff, and the city and region’s citizens -- at risk! Vote “NO” on

Corizon and yes to a transparent RFP process in DC. Lets support stakeholders, not stockholders, where public health is concerned.

We are looking forward to a future where D.C. correctional facilities and practices are a model for the country.