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Pahokee Youth Development Center

By Jim Slattery, CEO, Correctional Services Corporation

Recently, several articles have reported on delayed hearing release dates at Correctional Services Corporation's (CSC) Pahokee Youth Development Center (PYDC). Having reviewed the coverage carefully, we believe the entire story has not been told. By presenting the facts, Florida's youths, *Palm Beach Post* readers and the citizens of Palm Beach County will all be better served.

Background

The State Department of Education annually establishes the dates when Full Time Equivalence (FTE) counts are taken at schools, including Department of Juvenile Justice youth development facilities. The number of youths present at the time of the count determines the amount of funding a facility receives for that semester; such is the case at CSC's Pahokee facility.

During the fall of 1998, the intake coordinator at PYDC wrote a memo to case managers recommending that the review to determine eligibility for release of 10 youths be deferred until after the FTE count. The obvious intent was to increase education funds available for the school. As a result of the memo, four of the youths' hearing release dates were delayed no more than three days. The others were determined by the State Department of Juvenile Justice and Committing Judges to need more time in the program; one of them still remains at PYDC today.

Correctional Services Corporation's management has acknowledged this wrong action, disciplined the parties involved and cautioned staff at all facilities to ensure all company policies are strictly enforced. The PYDC intake coordinator's actions were not only inappropriate- they were needless. Bed space at the PYDC is in great demand. According to Deputy Secretary of the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice, George Hinchliffe, the State has a waiting list of more than 800 youths for residential treatment facilities.

Pahokee Facility Facts

The PYDC is the largest juvenile institution in South Florida with a 350-bed capacity. More than 500 youthful offenders successfully complete the PYDC rehabilitation program each year. The Company began operation of the facility in January of 1997. The level-6 facility, which requires a medium security environment, offers a full range of services to a male adolescent population between the ages of 14 and 18. Pahokee services include: educational and vocational programs, substance abuse and mental health counseling, family counseling, pre-release orientation and planning, job and career counseling, physical exercise, dispute resolution and life-skills training.

Youths committed to PYDC are subject to an indeterminate length of stay, generally ranging from six to nine months. All releases are granted based on a decision by the committing court- after its consideration of the recommendations from the Department of Juvenile Justice and the PYDC. The range of offenses committed by youths at PYDC is considerable and includes: aggravated battery, battery on a law enforcement officer, carrying a concealed weapon, armed burglary, auto theft, escape and attempted escape.

The Pahokee facility employs 257 corrections and educational professionals. The Company has put in place a staff that is trained to properly react to all emergencies, maintain self-control under even the most severe provocation, interact well with the juvenile offenders, and above all, provide safe and humane treatment at all times. Toward these ends, staff members receive regular training in all aspects of their jobs, including CSC's Code of Ethics and Compliance. All of our services are

provided in accordance with the guidelines issued by the contracting agencies and the facility has been accredited by both the American Correctional Association and the National Commission of Correctional Healthcare. Our quality assurance program requires strict compliance with the Code of Conduct for all employees and management personnel.

At Pahokee and all of CSC's facilities, which includes 9,814 aggregate beds and more than 3,800 full-time employees in 11 states and Puerto Rico, our mission is to protect the public by operating safe, humane and secure facilities that provide offenders with training, education and treatment programs designed to reduce recidivism.

At Pahokee in particular, the Company has taken steps to support the community and local economy. Of the 257 PYDC employees, 200 are residents of the Glades with an annual payroll of \$5.7 million. In addition, CSC has supported the City Recreation program, provided scholarships to both Pahokee High School and the Pahokee School of Choice and sponsored local events, including the Grassy Waters Festival.

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