

Prison Workers Protest Closing Guard Towers

Wednesday, September 9, 2009 7:32 AM

LUCASVILLE, Ohio — Corrections workers are protesting a plan to close guard towers at an Ohio prison that was the scene of a deadly 1993 riot.



Officers and other union employees planned to stage informational picketing Wednesday and Thursday at the Southern Ohio Correctional Facility in Lucasville.

Officials want to stop using six of the prison's eight towers and reassign the guards to duties inside the facility. Ohio prisons spokeswoman Julie Walbern says the move would not compromise public safety.

But the Ohio Civil Service Employees Association calls the towers the last line of defense between inmates and the community.

The union said its members would be joined on the picket line by a man held hostage during the riot, which left nine inmates and a guard dead.

©2009 by The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.

Type in your comments to post to the forum

Name
(appears on your post)

Comments

Type the numbers you see in the image on the right:

Post Comment



Guards to protest Lucasville plan

Informational picket will oppose security change

Wednesday, September 9, 2009 3:04 AM

BY ALAN JOHNSON

THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

A former corrections officer who was held hostage during the 1993 riot at the Southern Ohio Correctional Facility will be on the picket line there today to protest a plan to remove armed guards from six of the eight guard towers.

Jeff Ratcliff will join members of the Ohio Civil Service Employees Association, the union representing the majority of prison employees, at an around-the-clock informational picket outside the prison today and Thursday. It is not a work stoppage.

The union says the towers are the last line of defense between inmates and the public. Labor leaders argue the state is asking for trouble by removing the guards.

A union statement said that "members of the area community, including schoolteachers, parents with school-age children, members of the area home association, and other unions" will protest the change.

[Story continues below](#)

Advertisement

Busted: The Rise & Fall of Art Schlichter

A live interview with award-winning *Dispatch* Projects Desk Reporter Mike Wagner

CHATS
The Columbus Dispatch
Columbus Metropolitan Club

Join the conversation at the Wednesday, Sept. 9 luncheon at the Athletic Club of Columbus

Make your reservation today at www.columbusmetroclub.org

ART SCHLICHTER MIKE WAGNER

The prison on Rt. 728 just outside Lucasville is across the road from three schools and not far from a

development of large, new homes.

The Department of Rehabilitation and Correction wants to eliminate "posts" in the towers so it can move personnel to needed spots inside the prison.

Warden Phillip Kerns said the towers are outmoded because of more-modern, high-tech security systems. He said the towers give a false sense of security.

"The inmates know there's weapons in those towers, and that alone could be a deterrent," said Gary Shepherd, president of Local 7330 of the Ohio Civil Service Employees Association, in a recent interview.

The state and union have been unable to agree on a counterproposal to keep the towers open. As a result, the union decided to set up the informational picket.

Prison officials point out that none of the new state institutions, including the Ohio State Penitentiary (the "supermax" prison) in Youngstown, has guard towers.

ajohnson@dispatch.com

A former officer held hostage by inmates in the 1993 riot will join in opposing the removal of armed guards from six towers at the prison.

[Read 4 comments »](#)

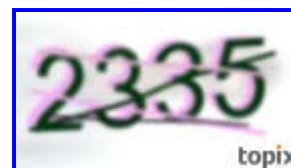
Type in your comments to post to the forum

Name
(appears
on your
post)

Comments

Type the numbers you see in the image on the right:

Post Comment



Sex Offender Arrested at Kiddie Land Faces Hearing

Last Update: 9/08 10:16 pm

A North Lima man allegedly caught violating his parole while at the Canfield Fair now faces a state hearing.

Seventy-five-year-old Vernon Clay was arrested Saturday when authorities spotted him on a bench near the children's rides. We're told that would violate the terms of his release after being convicted on sex charges in 2005.

The Ohio Adult Parole Authority is expected to hold a hearing later this month to determine whether or not Clay must be sent back to prison.



chicagotribune.com

Ill. juvenile centers didn't spend money for staff

Associated Press

11:49 AM CDT, September 8, 2009

SPRINGFIELD, Ill.

An audit shows the Illinois Legislature set aside nearly \$3 million for hiring officers at juvenile detention homes that didn't get hired.

The report Tuesday by Auditor General William Holland says lawmakers appropriated \$1.3 million in 2007 and \$1.6 million the next year to hire so-called "front-line" staff members to work with residents at the state's eight youth centers.

The Department of Juvenile Justice says it couldn't hire anyone because it took two years to write job specifications based on new regulations. And budget crises forced agencies to save some money.

But Holland's report shows the agency spent \$6.6 million on overtime and compensatory time off during the same period because of staff shortages.

Copyright 2009 Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten, or redistributed.

No Payments & No Interest for 12 Months* Replacement Windows
*when you use your Sears card, click for more details.

Sears Home Services **1-877-587-3029**

The advertisement features a photograph of a living room with a large window, a brown armchair, a side table with a lamp, and a potted plant. The text is overlaid on the top and left sides of the image.



Posted on Wed, Sep. 09, 2009

Bill would cancel prison food contract

By Valarie Honeycutt Spears
vhoneycutt@herald-leader.com

Complaints about the quality and quantity of food that a private company provides to Kentucky state prisons has led a state lawmaker to file a bill that would cancel the \$12 million annual contract.

Northpoint Training Center, where there was a riot last month, is one of several state prisons where inmates and corrections officers have complained about the food provided by Philadelphia-based Aramark Correctional Services, said state Rep. Brent Yonts, D-Greenville.

Yonts said he also is concerned that the illness of as many as 300 inmates at a Western Kentucky prison might have been caused by food.

"There's no reason for people to be treated inhumanely," Yonts said. "I don't think the system is recognizing the problem with Aramark. I'm hoping the administration will ... cancel the contract."

If the bill is passed by the Kentucky General Assembly in 2010, food service to inmates at state prisons could be provided only by state employees, inmates or volunteers. That was the case until January 2005, when the state contracted with Aramark. The contract was renewed in January 2009 and expires in 2011.

Yonts said he received many complaints from across the state about food quality, shortages and even "crawling creatures in the food" in the past year.

Inmates at Boyle County's Northpoint staged a sit-in in 2007 over the quality of food and prices of snacks in the prison canteen, according to the American Correctional Association.

In a riot at Northpoint on Aug. 21, inmates burned and damaged buildings, several of which were a total loss. Eight guards and eight inmates suffered minor injuries.

Yonts said that he sent a questionnaire about the food to corrections officers. The replies said that food problems have caused "control" problems with inmates.

Sarah Jarvis, a spokeswoman for Aramark, said Tuesday that the company "has an excellent track record" and has received many accolades.

"We reduce the costs to taxpayers of feeding inmates, while providing nutritious meals in close consultation with dietitians and nutritionists," she said.

In January, Aramark stopped serving meals at Florida prisons, citing rapid rises in food costs and a poor working relationship with the state. In 2008 alone, the company was fined \$241,499 by Florida for problems with the food and service, according to news reports.

Saving millions

State corrections officials say the contract with Aramark saves \$5 million each year and allowed them to give corrections officers a nearly 7 percent raise in 2008.

Northpoint inmates and family members have told the Herald-Leader that the quality and price of food and canteen items continues to be a source of unrest at the prison and might have figured in the August riots.

Jarvis said there is no evidence that the riots "were the result of anything other than gang-related activity and yard restrictions. Some of the facts in this story seem to be based on anecdotes, half-truths and suspicious complaints by inmates and others who ... ignore official reports and contradictory facts."

Incidents that led to the riot and fire are under investigation by the state Department of Corrections and State Police.

Source of illnesses unknown

At the Western Kentucky Correctional Complex at Fredonia, James Tolley, the public health director at Pennyryle District Health Department, said his staff has investigated three cases in 2009 in which inmates had gastrointestinal distress.

In one instance in the spring, Tolley said, as many as 300 inmates fell ill there.

State Corrections Department spokeswoman Cheryl Million said a foodborne illness was suspected, but it could not be verified in lab tests. Tolley said that even though lab results did not confirm that food was the problem, his staff advised food service

employees on safe food handling.

Yonts said he is looking into those cases.

"Inmates do complain about Aramark," Million said. However, she said, there were similar complaints before Aramark took over food service. The Department of Corrections receives, on average, 21 food grievances among 13 institutions each month, she said.

The state pays Aramark \$2.63 for each inmate each day, Million said.

Yonts said he also has received complaints about the food at Blackburn Correctional Complex in Fayette County.

Yonts' legislation barring private companies would not apply to canteens where inmates at state prisons can buy food, to local jails or to food provided to inmates being transferred from one prison to another.

Reach Valarie Honeycutt Spears at (859) 231-3409 or 1-800-950-6397, ext. 3409.

© 2009 Kentucky.com and wire service sources. All Rights Reserved. <http://www.kentucky.com>

Revise retirements

The recession underlines flaws in public pensions, making reform a necessity

Wednesday, September 9, 2009 2:59 AM

Ohio's public-employee pension plans long have provided above-market benefits at a below-market cost to employees. Ohio taxpayers, who bear most of the cost, have accepted this, even though most don't enjoy pensions nearly as generous.

But, now that a stock-market dive has hammered the pensions, restoring them to fiscal health without any changes in benefits or contributions would require a bigger hit than taxpayers should have to take.

Public pension plans should be brought in line with what is typical for private-sector employees, and that's going to mean changing some or all of the plans' key factors: raising contributions by employees; raising retirement ages; basing the annual retirement benefit on a five-year salary average instead of three; ending or reducing cost-of-living adjustments; and eliminating the lump-sum death benefit.

Those who say the "employer contribution" also should rise are wrong; they should remember that the "employer" is taxpayers, who have spent the past year watching their own retirement prospects shrink.

[Story continues below](#)

Advertisement

On Sept. 12, meet **RIB HILLIS** designer on ABC's *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* at

BEST OF Fall HOME SHOW.

presented by

Huntington Columbus, Ga. of Ohio TEETERS

Sept. 11-13
Ohio Expo Center
Multi-Purpose Building

The advertisement features a portrait of RIB HILLIS on the left. The background is a warm, golden-yellow color. Text is arranged in a vertical flow from top to bottom. Logos for sponsors are placed horizontally across the middle. The event dates and location are prominently displayed at the bottom.

Public employees won't like any of those changes, but they're necessary and fair.

Ohio's five major plans all lost close to a quarter of their value or more in the stock slide of the past year.

The Public Employees Retirement System lost 24 percent; the Ohio Police and Fire Pension Fund, 23.4 percent; the Ohio Highway Patrol Retirement System, 30.1 percent; the State Teachers Retirement System, 31.4 percent; and the School Employees Retirement System, 26.1 percent.

The losses aren't unlike what every stock-based fund has suffered. What would be unusual is if public employees faced none of the fallout that private-sector workers have.

Across the U.S., employees have seen cuts to their pension plans and restrictions on payouts. It's the logical consequence of a stock-market drop, because pension plans are designed with the assumption that the market will rise at a steady rate, infinitely. When that pattern is interrupted, the plan has to adjust. Public employees' plans should, too.

Moreover, public pension plans are overdue for adjustment, even without a drop in investment earnings.

The Employee Benefit Research Institute, a nonprofit organization that provides analysis of compensation issues and doesn't advocate particular policies, reported that, in 2007, state and local governments made retirement-savings contributions for employees in an amount equal to 11.6 percent of their employees' wages and salaries. For the private sector, the figure was 5 percent.

Along with the contribution and benefit rates, the retirement ages long taken for granted by teachers and civil servants have no reasonable basis.

Why should, say, an engineer or secretary working for the state be eligible to retire after 30 years, as young as age 48, when someone in a similar private-sector job can't collect full Social Security benefits before age 65?

This never was fair, and in the current financial circumstances, it's unsustainable.

The early retirement age also exacerbates another drain on public pensions: the fact that they offer health-care coverage, even though the law doesn't require it. If public employees worked until the normal retirement age, when they become eligible for Medicare, they wouldn't need health-care coverage from their pension.

And there is a larger issue to consider. Much of the private-sector has moved away from pension plans -- also called defined-benefit plans -- in favor of defined-contribution plans, such as the popular 401(k). Ultimately, the public sector should follow suit.

Politicians, who approve the terms of public pensions, won't be eager to invoke the wrath of public employees by scaling back some of the benefits they've come to take for granted.

But the only alternative is squeezing taxpayers harder, and that's worse.

Ads by Yahoo!

Cruelty of 'compassionate release'

By Steve Chapman
Chicago Tribune

Published on Wednesday, Sep 09, 2009

CHICAGO: People don't always get what they deserve in this world, so it is gratifying to see when someone does. It happened Wednesday when a California parole board insisted that Susan Atkins, a 61-year-old amputee with incurable brain cancer, live her few remaining months in prison rather than the embrace of her loved ones.

This may sound like pointless excess inflicted on someone whose crime, committed 40 years ago, is ancient history. But even to mention Atkins without first mentioning her victims is an affront. In 1969, she repeatedly thrust a knife into an innocent woman who was eight and a half months pregnant, killing her and her unborn child.

It's a crime that might be forgotten except that Atkins was a member of Charles Manson's murderous cult. Her victim, actress Sharon Tate, stabbed 16 times, was one of seven people slaughtered in Los Angeles in a two-night spree that Manson, insanely, thought would ignite a massive race war.

Atkins and her co-defendants were convicted and sentenced to die, but her sentence was reduced to life in prison when the state supreme court abolished capital punishment in 1972. Her illness served as grounds to ask the parole board for "compassionate release" so she could peacefully expire outside of prison.

Even her prosecutor, Vincent Bugliosi, endorsed the idea. "She's already paid substantially for her crime, close to 40 years behind bars," he told *The Los Angeles Times*. "She has terminal cancer. The mercy she was asking for is so minuscule."

But the parole board unanimously refused. No doubt the board members recalled that in a 1993 parole hearing, Atkins acknowledged that when she had her own opportunity to grant clemency, she chose not to. Tate begged Atkins to spare her baby, to no avail.

"Compassionate release" already has a bad name in this country because it was the basis for Scotland's decision to free the only person convicted in the 1988 airline bombing over Lockerbie, which killed 270 people. Abdel Baset al-Megrahi was serving a life sentence but, afflicted with terminal prostate cancer, was sent home to Libya to live out his remaining time on Earth.

Scottish Justice Secretary Kenny MacAskill defended the decision by saying, "Our justice system demands that judgment be imposed but compassion available." He noted that the killer "now faces a sentence imposed by a higher power. It is one that no court, in any jurisdiction, in any land, could revoke or overrule. It is terminal, final and irrevocable. He is going to die."

If we are going to rely on the Almighty in these matters, though, I would prefer that pleas for clemency from convicted killers also be addressed to Him. The truth is we are all going to die, and if we prefer not to do it in prison, we have the option of not committing crimes whose punishment might get in the way of our last wishes.

Like Atkins, Megrahi had already been spared execution, which amounts to gratuitous cruelty. Many of us who oppose the death penalty nonetheless think that when someone gets a life sentence, we should not have to parse the meaning of "life." It ought to mean till you're dead, which neither Atkins nor Megrahi is.

It's some consolation that Megrahi is something of an exception, since infamous killers don't usually get the chance to walk free. California law excludes "compassionate release" for anyone sentenced to life without parole. But mere life sentences often qualify for early release.

One was granted to Lynette "Squeaky" Fromme, a member of the Manson cult who was not involved in the Los Angeles murders but who in 1975 walked up to President Gerald Ford in Sacramento and shoved a loaded pistol in his face. She was convicted of attempted assassination and went to prison. But last month, still quite alive at 60, she was freed to go her merry way.

Maybe Fromme is now harmless, and maybe there is money to be saved by letting her or Atkins out of their taxpayer-financed housing. But few government funds were ever better spent. And it's hard to see why people who have committed violent crimes deserve any consideration beyond the fair trial and sentencing they have already gotten. Compassionate release is compassionate only to criminals, not their victims.

All this brings to mind the exchange in Ayn Rand's novel *Atlas Shrugged*, when one character asks another to define the opposite of charity. The answer? "Justice."

Chapman is a Chicago Tribune columnist. He blogs daily at newsblogs.chicagotribune.com/steve—chapman.

Editorials

> [News](#) > [Editorials](#)

Print this Page

[←--back to story](#)

System ought to prevent injustice

POSTED: September 8, 2009

We believe the vast majority of Ohioans think that the judicial system exists to provide justice, not just to put people in prison. If so, the system also ought to prevent injustices.

Modern science has provided tools that make it easier for law enforcement to apprehend criminals. They also have helped people wrongly convicted of crimes to win their release from prison.

Last year, an Ohio inmate, Robert McClendon, used DNA testing to prove beyond any doubt that he was innocent of raping a child many years ago. McClendon had spent 18 years in prison for a crime he did not commit.

A bill already approved by the state House of Representatives would improve safeguards against wrongful convictions. Among its provisions is one that would require prosecuting attorneys to retain DNA evidence as long as crimes remain unsolved - or people convicted of them remain in prison or on parole. Other safeguards involve genetic testing and methods of using witnesses to identify criminals.

The bill now is pending in the state Senate. Reportedly, Gov. Ted Strickland has indicated that he will sign the measure if it is sent to his desk.

We urge members of the state Senate to give the bill careful consideration. Certainly, no Ohio law should give criminals breaks - but the statutes also should not place and keep innocent people in prison.

[Subscribe to Tribune Chronicle | TribToday.com](#)

Share:

[Facebook](#) [MySpace](#) [Digg](#) [Stumble](#) [Buzz up!](#) [Mixx](#) [Fark](#) [del.icio.us](#) [LiveSpaces](#)

Management of DNA sample at issue in Wis. killings

By DINESH RAMDE (AP) – 14 hours ago

MILWAUKEE — Police investigating a string of cold-case slayings identified their prime suspect after obtaining DNA from his toothbrush late last month, but investigators should have had a sample from him eight years earlier.

Two state agencies are now disputing whether the sample — mandated by state law — was taken, and if so, what happened to it.

Walter E. Ellis of Milwaukee, arrested Saturday in connection with the deaths of nine women, was in prison from 1998 to 2001, which meant a state law enacted in 2000 should have applied to him. The law ordered corrections officials to obtain DNA from all people in prison on felony convictions. But the state Department of Justice said it never received the sample.

"We have no record that we received a convicted-offender sample from Mr. Ellis," spokesman Kevin St. John told The Associated Press.

In some cases, a person's sample yields an unusable profile, but the DOJ keeps records of those people to ensure proper follow-up. Ellis didn't show up on that list either, St. John added.

Wisconsin's Department of Corrections, which is responsible for providing the samples, said it complied with the law.

"The only information we have is an indication in our system that the specimen was collected on Feb. 4, 2001," said John Dipko, a corrections spokesman. He said the sample would have been sent to the state crime lab, which is under the jurisdiction of the state DOJ.

Police Chief Edward Flynn said authorities couldn't find Ellis' DNA profile in a statewide database, forcing them to take the high-risk step of obtaining a sample directly even if doing so tipped off Ellis that police were investigating him.

Authorities began to focus on Ellis, 49, after his name surfaced in connection with a number of unsolved homicides, Flynn said, but did not elaborate. Police arrested him Saturday after a state crime lab said his DNA matched samples taken from the nine women killed between 1986 and 2007.

"It's certainly speculative but a plausible speculation that if his DNA had been collected in 2001 that certainly the pattern would have been discerned perhaps more quickly," Flynn told CNN. "Certainly we would have identified a suspect more quickly."

A message left with Flynn's office Tuesday was not immediately returned.

Ellis was captured after a struggle when an alert officer spotted his car at a motel, authorities said.

He was charged in the deaths of two of the nine women, and more charges are expected this week, prosecutors said Monday.

The state public defender's office said Tuesday that no attorney had been assigned to him.

Ellis served his previous prison sentence after pleading no contest to a reduced charge of second-degree reckless injury. He was released from prison in 2001 and from state supervision in 2003, when corrections officials would have verified that his DNA sample was in the system, Dipko said.

Police said Ellis' DNA was found on the bodies of nine women aged 16 to 41 who were killed on the city's north side. Investigators believe eight of the women were prostitutes and one was a runaway.

Authorities previously have speculated that the person whose DNA they recovered on the runaway had sex with that girl but that someone else killed her. But Chisholm would not say Monday whether anyone else would be charged in the killings.

Copyright © 2009 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.