

Testimony in favor of SB 1005  
April 5, 2017

On behalf of: Enlace  
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Addressed to: Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee  
Chair Floyd Prozanski  
Vice-Chair Kim Thatcher  
Senator Michael Dembrow  
Senator Dennis Linthicum  
Senator James Manning Jr.

Chair Prozanski, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to give testimony in support of SB 1005, the bill to divest PERS of financial interests in the private prison industry.

My name is Jamie Trinkle, my home address is 1205 SW Cardinell Dr in Portland, Oregon. I'm the Senior Campaign and Research Coordinator of Enlace, a non-profit organization representing low-wage workers based in Portland, and convener of the National Prison Divestment Campaign.

The state has a fiduciary responsibility to protect the value of the pension fund. That responsibility can be upheld when PERS divests from private prisons and their major investors.

Divestment from private prisons companies now is essential to uphold the dignity of all of our Oregon communities and of Black, immigrant, Muslim, Latino, LGBTQ and poor people across the country.

Private prisons have driven and ridden the wave of tough on crime, and immigration enforcement policies that now lead to 2.5 million incarcerated nationally and over 2 million people deported over the last 10 years. In the 1990s, CoreCivic and GEO lobbied for tough on crime policies at the state level that disproportionately targeted Black people to serve longer sentences. Indeed, private prisons have a disproportionate number of prisoners of color compared to state prisons. In the early 2000s, CCA and GEO shifted to lobbying for immigration enforcement at the federal level, leading to a monumental shift in our federal policies of locking up immigrants as they await their claims. By 2010, CCA was in a position to criminalize immigrants at the state level, drafting and lobbying to secure the passage of SB 1070 in Arizona. Now, 34,000 immigrants are detained each night in private prisons, with over 70% detained in private prisons. For example, in 2014, GEO Group and CCA spent \$5.9 million on lobbying and campaign contributions. A recent report by In the Public Interest reveals that in 2015, one of CCA and GEO's top lobbying priorities was the Department of Homeland Security

Appropriations Act, which directs funds towards immigrant detention and electronic monitoring under Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).<sup>1</sup>

CCA and GEO are not content with the caging of bodies of color, and are expanding into new areas like re-entry services. This sounds okay before you think for a moment and realize that private prison companies have a perverse incentive to control the methods by which people who are incarcerated would re-enter society, and to actually see them re-incarcerated.

Now it is time for Oregon PERS to recognize its complicity in the furtherance of these policies, how they play out locally ensuring that nearly every one of our immigrant community members who is arrested by ICE will wind up at the GEO Group's infamous NW Detention Center. A facility that places a dollar amount on each immigrant's head, and has conditions so abysmal that detainees went on hunger strike in 2014 for months, inspiring detainees at other GEO facilities across the country to protest the human and labor violations that are the business plan of GEO. The conditions protested are now the basis for a class action law suit from immigrants detained at GEO Group's facility in Aurora, Colorado.

Policies lobbied for by and benefiting private prison companies are hurting our communities. They also ensure that our national and state funds will go towards expensive practices of caging and policing that destroy individuals' lives and the social fabric of targeted communities of color and immigrant communities. Instead, we should be investing in education and social services.

The Million Shares club profit from our harmful criminal and immigration systems. Many of the 30 companies and hedge funds who own over one million shares of Geo Group and Core Civic are long term investors. These long term investors (including managers who invest on behalf of their clients) have taken active positions as proxy voters in important votes such as those governing sexual assault policies, human rights policies, and transparency.

**Financial institutions share lobbyists with prison corporations:**

In 2014, JP Morgan Chase shared lobbyists through firm McAbee Strategies with Corrections Corporation of America. This is evidence of what we have presumed is the case: when finance institutions have money directly invested in and are serving as lenders to prison corporations, there are more incentives to play together in pursuit of shared policy interests.

**Financial institutions lend to prison corporations:**

Wells Fargo, JP Morgan Chase, and HSBC are all major lenders to the prison industry. The lending of billions of dollars by these banks and several others allows prison corporations to build more prisons, detention centers, and to monetize misery through expanding into surveillance, halfway house, and mental health.

We are tired of this system of incarceration and state investments upholding this system. We are tired of stories like David's, a Portland resident and political refugee from Central America:

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.inthepublicinterest.org/wp-content/uploads/ITPI\\_BuyingInfluence\\_Oct2016.pdf](https://www.inthepublicinterest.org/wp-content/uploads/ITPI_BuyingInfluence_Oct2016.pdf)

*In my time at the Northwest Detention Center I experienced human rights abuses that no individual should be subject to. I was put in solitary confinement multiple times, at one point for six continuous months. I had little to no interaction with other people and was subject to verbal and physical abuse daily. In the general population, the rooms were constantly overcrowded with people sleeping on the floors.*

*The guards would physically force people who didn't speak English to sign deportation releases without their consent, and use excessive violence without any repercussions. I would work hard manual labor for up to 8 hours and get paid only \$1 a day. On top of that, the prices of the products in commissary were all extremely expensive. A 15 minute phone call would cost \$10, collect calls were \$2.50 a minute. The food lacked any sort of nutrition, consisting mainly of starchy, low grade food.*

*I was working on getting my GED before being taken to the detention center so when I got there i asked if I could have a few GED books to study but they refused and in fact, said that immigrants should not be allowed to get an education, especially because they shouldn't been in the US in the first place.*

*On top of all of this, there was no mental health support in the detention center or after getting released, leaving me coping alone with permanent mental and emotional damage.*

After 3 years, David was released from detention and is now living on the streets in our city awaiting the results of his immigration case. There is no justice in David's story, and he is just one of thousands.

Now, we call on this legislature and the Oregon Investment Council to have the courage to align our investments with our values. There are other investment options. It won't be hard to find them. In a time of increasing attacks on immigrants and people of color, this is an opportunity for us as Oregonians to stand up with a different vision for what our communities need.

When PERS divests from prisons, we will become a national leader on this issue. Cities and Universities across the country are divesting from prisons, and from corporations complicit in human rights abuses and harm of many kinds, from divesting from the Dakota Access Pipeline to the Occupation of Palestine, to fossil fuels. This legislature now has the opportunity to act as well.

We thank Senator Taylor for the leadership that she has shown in bringing this bill to the Committee. We are committed to working with you and our partners at the Oregon Education Association as this legislation moves forward. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and we are happy to answer any follow up questions today or in the future.