



**National
Urban League**

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Florida Atlantic University Should Take Private Prison Company Name off Football Stadium

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GEO Group "is a terrible company with a well-publicized track record of abuse and neglect and FAU should be ashamed to be associated with them." Carl Takei, staff attorney for the ACLU's National Prison Project

I was shocked by a disturbing headline on the front page of the New York Times sports section last week: "A company That Runs Prisons Will Have Its Name on a Stadium." The article revealed that the stadium in question was not the home of a professional football team, but of the Florida Atlantic University (FAU) Owls who play in the University's new \$70 million dollar, 29,000-seat stadium located on its Boca Raton campus.

The GEO Group Stadium naming rights were secured with a \$6 million donation to FAU paid through the charitable arm of the nation's second largest operator of for-profit prisons. The power of America's prison industrial complex has now formed an unholy alliance with the big money game of college sports. And if that weren't bad enough, the GEO Group has a well-documented and extensive record of abuse and neglect in the facilities it runs.

A recent Sun-Sentinel newspaper article describes how two young adult illegal immigrants surreptitiously exposed conditions inside the GEO Group-run Broward Transitional Center (BTC), where hundreds of illegal immigrants who have committed no crimes or only minor non-violent ones, are held sometimes for months in terrible conditions. According to the article, "Once inside, they said they found people unjustly arrested and subjected to lengthy and unnecessary confinement, and reported incidents of substandard or callous medical care, including a woman taken for ovarian surgery and returned the same day, still bleeding, to her cell, and a man who urinated blood for days but wasn't taken to see a doctor." In response to this investigation, 26 members of Congress, including South Florida Democrats, Ted Deutch, Frederica Wilson and Alcee Hastings, wrote a letter to the director of the U.S. Immigration Customs Enforcement demanding a full review of conditions at BTC.

Last year, a federal judge, in response to a joint ACLU/Southern Poverty Law Center lawsuit, called the GEO Group's Walnut Grove Youth Correctional Facility in Mississippi, "a cesspool of unconstitutional and inhumane acts and conditions...a picture of such horror as should be unrealized anywhere in the civilized world." The judge ordered mass transfers out of the prison and prohibited further solitary confinement of youth. Soon after the judge's ruling, the State of Mississippi ended its contract with GEO.

I am not the only one outraged by the attempt of a clearly tainted private prison company to clean up its name by associating with a college football team. Both the National Immigration Youth Alliance and the ACLU have called on FAU to reconsider its decision to associate itself with GEO group and FAU students have started derisively calling the new stadium "Owlcatraz." In its statement, ACLU added, "Prison profiteers like GEO depend for their profits on the continued large-scale incarceration of young men and women – many of whom are people of color. Nationwide, 58% of the people in prison are African American or Latino. So the FAU Owls football team (most of whom are African American themselves) will be sponsored by a company whose core business depends on the continued over-incarceration of young people who look much like themselves."

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